TELEVISION IN MALAYSIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUNG ADULTS' PERCEPTIONS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

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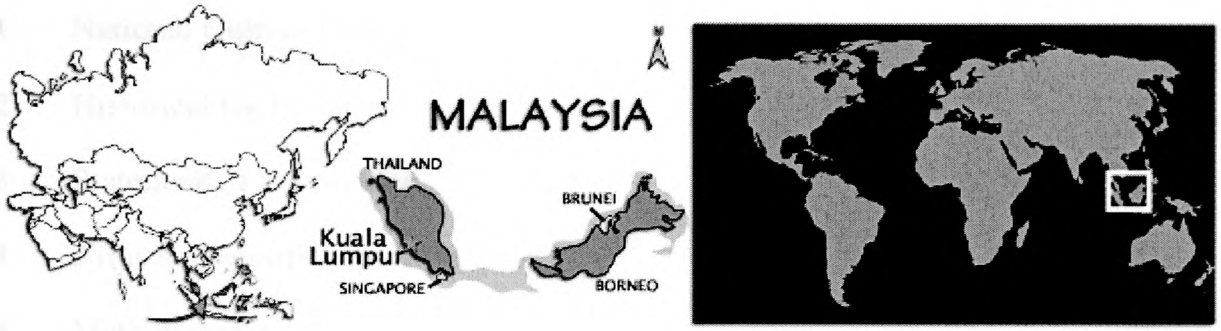
- Abstract -

Television has long been recognised by Malaysian state officials to be a vital tool in the promotion of a collective sense of national identity amongst the country's citizens. The aims of this thesis are as follows. Firstly, to clarify through current debates what national identity is, both generally and in the context of Malaysia. Secondly, to explore and analyse key aspects of the ways young adult Malaysians use and respond to television. Thirdly, to examine the perceptions of these young adults about the way television represents Malaysian national identity. Fourthly, to investigate the extent to which ethnicity influences their perceptions of the representation of national identity on television. The methodologies used in this study involved, firstly, undertaking a critical review of the literature with regard to the relationship of national identity and television, both internationally and with reference to Malaysia. Secondly, a short exploratory survey was used to establish background information on the young adults' viewing habits. Thirdly, focus group sessions were used to collect in-depth data on how young adults from different ethnic backgrounds related to television images of national identity. This thesis concludes that ethnicity played a decisive role in shaping these young people's perceptions of national identity through television. Thus whilst the NCP and subsequent government policies have sought to utilise television in the promotion of national identity, this research suggests that such efforts may have only partly succeeded in producing images that have a positive resonance with young adults in Malaysia.

MAP OF MALAYSIA



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-Overview-

The objective of this study is to examine aspects of the relationships between young adults, television and national identity in the multi-ethnic context of Malaysia. The issue of national identity in Malaysia has been of particular significance since the creation of the National Culture Policy in 1971. At that time, television was formally recognised as a useful medium for promoting national cultural goals. Since then, the Malaysian government has made an effort to reduce the quota of imported programmes on Malaysian television and to increase the amount of locally (i.e. Malaysian) produced programmes, so as to encourage the promotion of Malaysian national identity; but these aspirations have met with limited success. It is not only global television that has been seen by successive governments as a threat to Malaysia's national culture and identity; locally produced programmes have also been accused of promoting the interests of majority groups (Malays and Chinese) while marginalizing those of minority groups (Indian and ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak). Successive governments have therefore sought to promote national identity, by producing programmes that portray inter-ethnic relationships in a positive manner. Critics however, have, charged that these programmes are far too stereotypical in their representation of ethnicity.

Audience research in Malaysia has traditionally provided only a limited knowledge of viewers' perceptions and attitudes towards television images. This research suggests that there remain important aspects of audiences' perceptions, which are in need of further investigation. Thus, this study attempts to reveal more about the responses of audiences to television, and in particular how they relate to the question of the portrayal of national identity. The key aims of the study are as follows: firstly, to explore and clarify debates about what is national identity, both generally and in the context of Malaysia. Secondly, to explore

and analyse aspects of the ways young adult Malaysians use and respond to television. Thirdly, to examine the perceptions of young adults in Malaysia about the way television represents Malaysian national identity; and, finally to investigate the extent to which ethnicity influences perceptions of the representation of national identity on television.

Two sets of data were compiled for the study. The first was compiled using an exploratory survey of 120 respondents, aimed at providing background information on their television viewing habits. The second set was the result of a series of mini-focus group interviews conducted with 59 participants and which was designed to gauge in-depth information about audience perceptions, and interpretations of television. The selection of the groups took into account the sensitivities of the different ethnic and social backgrounds of the participants. Visual aids were used to facilitate group discussions. Finally, special attention was paid to the different social backgrounds of participants to help contextualise how they perceived their sense of belonging to Malaysia. Overall then, the reason for conducting this study in this way was to collect and interpret sufficient empirical data to produce new insights into the attitudes, perceptions and opinions of the participants in relation to their understanding of national identity as represented on Malaysian television.

This study has been divided into six chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction to the thesis by briefly describing the nature of the research, with reference to a brief account of the debate surrounding the concept of national identity in general and, more specifically, in the context of Malaysia. This chapter also provides a summary of the history of television in Malaysia, a statement of the research problems, and of the aims, significance and methodology of the study.

Chapter Two briefly reviews different academic perspectives on the concept of national identity in general and then discusses the introduction of the National Culture Policy (NCP)

as a part of the government's attempt to promote nation building to further the formulation of a distinctive 'national identity' in Malaysia.

Chapter Three provides a brief historical overview of the development of television in Malaysia. This chapter also analyses a range of issues surrounding the television industry in Malaysia and evaluates research on the content of television.

Chapter Four identifies key aspects of current issues surrounding television audiences. This includes a historical perspective on studies of television audiences, although the focus is on relevant debates within media studies about the audience's relationship to television.

Chapter Five outlines the methods used to collect data for the study, including the use of an exploratory survey and a series of focus group discussions. It also outlines the nature of the two approaches and the detailed processes involved in the study's design and it's application.

Chapter Six presents the results of the exploratory survey as well as the results from the focus group discussions. The presentation of the focus group results is divided into four main thematic sections. These sections are: 'Self identification and the sense of belonging to the nation', 'Viewing habits and perceptions of Malaysian television', 'Television construction and deconstruction of national identity' and 'Television stereotypes and national unity'. Chapter Seven provides the conclusion of the study, and offers recommendations for future research within this field.

- Chapter One -

Thesis Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the key elements of the study. It looks at the complex nature of national identity and the idea of 'belonging'. It also outlines the three basic principles of the formulation of the National Culture Policy (NCP). Following from this, it provides a historical background to television in Malaysia before identifying the main research problem. Finally, it outlines the aims of the study and the chosen methodology.

1.1 National Culture Policy

National identity is a multi-faceted concept. General academic debate about this concept highlights its inherent complexities. Broadly speaking, however, this thesis will argue that there are two particularly important perspectives. The first perspective on national identity emphasises the role of 'life-experience', which means that the individual creates and inhabits their own sense of national identity via the shared territory, culture, language, myths and historical memories of a society. Their understanding of national identity contributes, in turn, to their sense of belonging to their community (Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1984; Anderson, 1991; Parekh, 1995, Shamsul, 1996a; Poole, 1999). The second perspective on national identity will be described as 'authority-defined' national identity. From this perspective, national identity is shaped and defined by the ruling elites, namely to help extend their interest in managing society. Ruling definitions of national identity reinforce the citizen's emotional attachment to, and sense of security with, the state (Hobsbawam, 1983; Miller, 1995 and Shamsul, 1996a). Significantly, the more secure the citizen feels under state control, the more 'banal' or 'taken-for-granted' their sense of national identity is likely to be (Billig, 1995).

In Malaysia, the significance of this sense of belonging to the well being of the nation was given greater emphasis by the government's formulation of the National Culture Policy (NCP) in 1971. This policy was a direct response to the ethnic disturbances of 1969. The NCP aimed to "strengthen national unity, to foster national identity and to enrich the socio-economic order with the objective of striking a balance between 'humanity and spirituality'"(Malaysia, 1973: vii). Underlying the formulation of the NCP were three basic principles. These measures were to be based on the indigenous culture of the region, that suitable parts from all the ethnic cultures were to form elements of the National Culture, and that Islam was to be designated an important role in moulding the National Culture (Malaysia, 1973: vii). At a NCP seminar held by the government in 1971, television (among other institutions) was recognised as an important medium for promoting the core ideas of the NCP (Dol Ramli, 1973: 67).

1.2 Historical background

Television was introduced in Malaysia in December 1963. The first channel was known as TV1 and a second channel, TV 2, was introduced in 1969. Both channels were and remain jointly funded by the government and by advertising revenues. These channels are directly operated and controlled by the Ministry of Information (MOI) (see the explanation of the role of MOI in Chapter Three). According to their mission statement, the two channels should propagate government policies, promote Malaysian art and culture, and provide education, general information and entertainment (Karthigesu, 1988:307).

It was not until 1984 that a privately owned television station, TV 3, was permitted. This private television station remained, in effect, under the control of the Ministry of Information. In 1994, a second private channel, known as Metro Television, was introduced, with coverage that was limited to the Kelang Valley, a province in Kuala Lumpur. In late 1995, the first cable television channel, Mega TV, was introduced. This

cable television company is a subsidiary of TV 3. It should also be noted that all television content is subject to regulation by the Ministry of Information.

In 1996, Malaysia introduced its first satellite television, ASTRO (All Asia Television and Radio Company). This was made possible by the launch of MEASAT (Malaysian East Satellite System) I and II. The introduction of satellite television appeared to offer the opportunity for offshore broadcasters to enter into the Malaysian television market. This was not the case, however, as entry into the domestic satellite market was subject to restrictions and limitations imposed by the Malaysian government. The Malaysian government only allows the public to use a 60-centimetre satellite dish, which is only able to receive transmissions via MEASAT. ASTRO, although privately owned, is still 'loosely' regulated by the government. The service is subscription based, offering 24 television channels. Seventeen of them are channels from Asian countries and the United States. Only seven are local channels. The local channels include three Malay, one Indian and one Chinese channel and two government channels, TV 1 and TV 2 (ASTRO, 1997). The latest development in broadcasting in Malaysia relevant to this study was the introduction of the seventh channel, NTV7 on the 7th of April 1998. One of the objectives of NTV 7 was to further promote nation building and to integrate both Peninsular Malaysia (West Malaysia) and Sabah and Sarawak (East Malaysia) (Ntv 7,nd).

1.3 Statement of the research problem

The issue of National Identity in Malaysia took on greater significance in 1971 with the creation of the National Culture Policy. Whilst the policy provided for the accommodation of non-Malay culture, as demonstrated by the second element in the policy, such an accommodation was not meant to detract from the importance of the first and third elements (Zaharom,1994: 160). However, the key aim of the policy, that of building a multi-ethnic culture in Malaysia, has not been fulfilled. There have been voices of dissatisfaction with the policy, especially those raised by ethnic minority groups such as

the Chinese, Indian and the indigenous communities of the states of Sabah and Sarawak. They often claim that the way the National Culture Policy has been implemented has favoured the dominant Malay culture (Noor Bathi, 1996: 142).

At the Congress of National Culture Policy in 1971, television was adopted as a medium for promoting national culture. Television services were encouraged by the Ministry of Information to promote Malaysian Culture through local programmes. It has always been the intention of the Malaysian government to increase the percentage of local programming. Quotas have been introduced which restrict the broadcast of programmes that have no local cultural links, that is, imported programmes. Since the emergence of television in Malaysia in 1963, almost half of television content has been imported due to the limited capacity of local productions (Karthigesu, 1988; Zaharom, 1996).

Research studies on television in Malaysia have shown that imported programmes have long dominated the industry. Nevertheless, during the 1990's, television in Malaysia has also witnessed an increase in the number of local productions, some of which have been ostensibly designed to promote Malaysian culture and to enhance the promotion of nation building by expressing a distinctive Malaysian identity. Findings by Zaharom (1996: 169-170) noted however that most of the locally produced programmes were 'imitations' of western genres. This phenomenon can be regarded as the alteration of imported genres, to become local in form and content so as to attract Malaysian audiences. Thus, Zaharom argues, the desire of the Malaysian government to use television to promote and enhance national identity has never been achieved.

This raises an important question concerning national identity and national culture. Not only has global television been seen as a threat to Malaysia's national culture and national identity, but at the national level itself, television in Malaysia is noted as only representing the interests of the majority, particularly the Malays and Chinese, whilst marginalising those of minority groups (Wang and Mustafa, 1996). Nevertheless some efforts have been

made to promote national unity and to further develop the creation of a collective identity, namely by producing programmes that portray inter–ethnic relationships in a positive way. However, these programmes tend to be far too stereotypical in the way they represent local characters on Malaysian television. Malay men are often portrayed as being obsessed with the idea of having a second wife and Malay women are represented as gossips; while the Chinese are seen as successful businessmen and businesswomen, and Indians are portrayed as poor unskilled characters (Noor Bathi, 1996: 156).

1.4 Aims and significance of the study

As noted earlier, there has been an ongoing debate about the role of television in promoting national cultural identity. Studies of media texts, i.e. of television content, have revealed only a partial view of the discourse of national identity on television, while leaving the views of audiences unstudied. Given that locally-produced programmes on Malaysian television are firmly based around separate ethnic groups, how does this impact upon young adults' perception of their national identity? Do these programmes strengthen or undermine the idea of one national culture and national identity in the mind of young adults? Do the interpretations of television programmes by young adults involve any recognition of the influence of western cultural dominance? These problems lend themselves to scholarly investigation of Malaysian audiences and their interpretation of television images.

In short, the aims of the study are as follows. Firstly, to clarify through current debates what national identity is, both generally and in the context of Malaysia. Secondly, to explore and analyse key aspects of the ways young adult Malaysians use and respond to television. Thirdly, to examine the perceptions of young adults in Malaysia about the way television represents national identity. Finally, to investigate the extent to which ethnicity influences perceptions of the representation of national identity on television.

Most audience research conducted in Malaysia to date has revealed little knowledge about audiences' perceptions about and attitudes towards television images. In most cases, audience studies in Malaysia revolve around audience viewing habits, such as favourite channels, programmes, number of hours spent watching television, and so forth. These studies have typically been based on quantitative approaches, mainly the use of survey questionnaires. This data has provided useful background information on the viewing habits of audiences, but fails to provide an in-depth and detailed picture of the complexity of audience perceptions and interpretations of television images. Some interesting research into aspects of audience understandings of television images has been done by the Young Times Organisation in 1995 (*New Straits Times,* 13 September 1995). The results of this study were again restricted mainly to audience viewing habits. However, it made some attempts to discover perceptions towards local programmes and the 'use' of television programmes by young Malaysians. One particularly important attempt to approach the study of audiences within a qualitative tradition was initiated by Wilson in 1996. His study investigated how Malaysian audiences responded to television talk shows and U.S popular dramas. His work analysed some of the ways audiences establish meaning relations in the course of their involvement with the programmes. In a more recent study, Latifah and Samsudin (1999) made used of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to collect empirical data regarding the influence of media images on young adults. However, their results are mainly quantitative, being concerned with patterns of representation and so did not reveal in-depth data on young adults' lived relationship to television.

Whilst these and related studies have provided interesting and important data (to be discussed further below), most of this type of research has failed to provide in-depth information about audience interpretations of television images. Furthermore, these studies have been mainly concerned with the viewpoints of the Malay, Chinese and Indian, and so have not paid sufficient attention to the views voiced by other ethnic minority groups. Having recognised the lack of research within this area, an investigation into the

implications that television has for young adults' perception of national identity will make an invaluable contribution to existing audience research in Malaysia.

1.5 Methodologies

The methodologies used in this study involved, firstly, undertaking a critical review of the research literature with regard to the relationship of national identity and television, both internationally and with reference to Malaysia. Secondly, a short exploratory survey was used to establish background information on the young adults' viewing habits. Thirdly, focus group sessions were used to collect in-depth data on how young adults from different ethnic backgrounds relate to television images of national identity.

The site for the fieldwork was a university institution. The reason for choosing a group of university students for this study was based on several factors. Firstly, university students will play an important role in the future of Malaysian society, thus it is important to investigate how young adults view the representation of national identity on television. Secondly, given that the television viewing activities of university students are not subject to parental control, their interpretations of television can be viewed as being based solely on their viewing preferences. Thirdly, university students form a relatively small, cohesive, pool of respondents, which made access to them manageable. Fourthly, students are articulate and able to respond well to open questions. Finally, financial and time constraints were an important consideration when deciding on the research, and this focus on university students made the conduct of the research practicable. A series of 12 mini focus groups, ranging from 4 to 7 participants per group, were conducted. There were 59 respondents aged between 18 and 23 years with different ethnic and social backgrounds.

1.6 Conclusions

It is not the intention of this study to assess the overall significance of national identity in Malaysia, this being a task left for other academic commentators in the future. Instead, it

is hoped that this empirical research will contribute to filling a serious gap in existing research, specifically with respect to how young people in Malaysia respond to representations and projections of national identity on television.

– Chapter Two –

National Identity

2.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to establish a framework for an analysis of the concept of national identity. It will be applied to the subsequent discussions about young adults in Malaysia with regard to how they construct their perceptions of national identity with respect to television images.

The first part of this chapter provides a brief review of selected academic perspectives on the general concept of national identity. The will describe 'key debates' about what the concept of national identity involves, rather than to provide an exhaustive analysis of the enormous wealth of literature available on the subject. The objective is to establish a working definition, comprising key indicators, of what amounts to "national identity." As such, it will serve as a base point for an evaluation of the extent to which young adults in Malaysia have developed a sense of national identity, with particular reference to the role of television.

The second part of this chapter surveys important dynamics, such as the emergence of Malaysia as an independent nation and the response of the Malaysian Government to the divisive racial disturbances in 1969, shaping the ongoing debate about national identity in Malaysia. Particular reference is made to the creation and impact of the 1971 National Culture Policy. Of significance to the process of creating a concept of Malaysian identity by the government is what the Malaysian Government perceives Malaysian identity to be, and what state officials wished to achieve by creating that concept. The relevance of this discussion of the Government's initiative revolves around the fact that it afforded a central

role to television in the forging of a collective perception of national identity in the multi-ethnic society of Malaysia.

2.1 Part 1:'Personal', 'social' and 'national' identity distinguished

The notion of national identity is a dual concept. It is made up of a sense of identity qualified, in turn, by the concept of nationality. In seeking to define national identity there is value in first identifying what it is not. In as much as concepts of identity are wider than the concept of national identity, drawing a boundary between the two concepts is valuable, particularly since the literature often fails to do so. There is a tendency by some academics, as will be shown below, to draw conclusions about national identity on the basis of a broader concept of identity, one relating to senses of personal and social identity.

At first glance, a personal sense of identity appears to relate to the fact that every person is an individual with their own sense of who they are and what they represent, their goals and aspirations and station in life, which could include some personal sense of national identity. Aspects of personal identity will change, develop and evolve as a reaction to and an interaction with the individual's life experiences. Thus "the formulation of identity may be a life long task that is never accomplished except in a relative sense" (Labouvie-Vief, 1978; cited by Heidt, 1987: 70). It is closely related to social identity in that the peer pressure to conform to the norms of society may shape the individual's sense of identity in a significant way (Conger, 1978: 136).

It is similarly apparent that a sense of social identity or community relates to a sense of belonging within, firstly, the immediate family or household, and, secondly, to the surrounding community. Such a sense is stronger in some individuals than others. Social bonding is an integral part of life for some individuals, but not so for others as a matter of personal choice. Some families create strong family ties and bonds whilst others fragment. Some individuals bond with others to form tight knit social groups in the neighbourhood,

at work or in a club, thus forming a sub-community within the community. Even the loner cannot completely distance themselves from the community within which they live. Social identity is also 'real' to the extent that it arises out of actual or close physical contact or proximity to the other members of the community (Shamsul, 1996a: 477) and is thus experienced by the individual (Heidt, 1987: 69).

The distinction, between personal and social identities and a sense of national identity, is that the former are consequences of living within and interacting with one's immediate society, whereas a sense of national identity is less easy to pinpoint and define. It is something broader and less immediate. Just as it is possible for an individual to immerse himself or herself in the immediate family, broadly to the exclusion of the local community, so a local community may develop distinct characteristics, which are not a reflection of the national character. On the other-hand, the atypical family can represent a microcosm of the local community and some local communities are considered to represent a microcosm of the national community.

In seeking to define what amounts to a sense of national identity, and how and why it is acquired, care needs to be taken to distinguish between elements of behaviour that owe more to a sense of social identity and those elements that are directly related to a sense of national identity, though this is no easy matter. The boundaries are not always clearly marked and may merge or even crossover at times. To the extent that a group or community seeks to remodel the nation in its own image, a community or social identity can form the basis of what Shamsul (1996a:483) identifies as a 'nation of intent'.[1] Parekh (1995) on the other-hand, dismisses self-understanding as a way of defining national identity, even though included in the individual's understanding of whom and what they are is some element of a personal sense of national identity. Unless that personal sense of identity is part of a broader, commonly accepted consensus, it provides no guidance to what is involved in the concept of national identity (1995: 256-257). Parekh's (1995) view

accords with Anderson's (1991) concept of the 'national identity within an imagined community'. Shamsul (1996a) reconciles the two views, by stating that Anderson's imagined community relates to the past, at a point of time when a dynamic force crystallises into a movement which results in the creation of a nation, whereas the 'nation of intent' represents one of many competing versions of what the nations should represent (Shamsul, 1996a: 486; footnote 9).

Heidt (1987) examines the reverse effect of national and or collective identity on the individual (1987:73-75). Heidt uses the terms 'national' and 'collective' interchangeably. Since empirical research involving the questioning of individuals about their sense of identity is likely to result in responses which cross over between personal, community and national identity, how may the analyst of such data tease out that information which is specific to national identity? Heidt turns to the use Parson's (1973) concept of cultural identity in respect of the identity of the individual in relation to his or her culture, equating it with the nature and strength of the bonds, by which the individual is attached to a collectivity (Heidt,1987:74). Tehranian (1981) distinguishes three general sources of identity, namely 'primordial' (race, sex, age, language, culture) social (class, professional status) and political or civil, the last one being defined around ideological and political abstractions (cited in Heidt 1987:75). Arguably therefore, it is the link between an individual's general reflections on these aspects of identity and their impact on the individual's particular sense of national identity, as evidenced by the extent to which that aspect of identity reinforces and reflects a bond of loyalty to the nation, that is significant for this study. Equally, those aspects that have no impact on the bond of loyalty have no particular significance in the present context.

2.1.1 National characteristics and national identity distinguished

A perception of national characteristics is something that others, that is to say 'outsiders' or 'foreigners', will form of the peoples of a nation. Whilst there may be some elements of

truth in such perceptions they are nothing more than generalizations and broad caricatures of the common or predominant culture of a region. Such generalizations are based on assumed features within a group that outsiders perceive as being distinct and distinguishable from others. Again, Parekh (1995:256) dismisses this way of defining national identity. A sense of national identity, he argues, must be something that is felt by the members of the nation but which goes beyond any mere sense of cultural identity. This ignores the fact, however, that once a characteristic is commonly applied to a group, those within the group may adopt and exaggerate that characteristic to fulfil the expectations of others, particularly if that characteristic is viewed as being a flattering and desirable attribute. Indeed the outside view of a nation may even be the result of successful propaganda by the nation to the world community. Thus Malaysia's bold assertion to the world that it is a multi-cultural society may be so successful that the rest of the world perceives it as being so, thereby meaning that the national and outside views reinforce each other.

Heidt (1987) considers the problems of defining a nation by means of objective characteristics or 'specific determinants', such as a real or imaginary territory, or a shared history or common culture (including common language, ethnic origin, common religion and shared social and economic structures and institutions). With the exception of common culture, the list is the same as that often used to identify cultural groups and communities (1987: 121-124). Furthermore, the list neglects the political dimension of nation, whilst including elements that he demonstrates are not present in a number of established nations. Thus, Switzerland does not have a common language, for example, and there is no common ethnic origin that applies to the Russian population. Thus it is a mere list of examples of commonly found features, none of which is essential to nationhood, proving that there is no objective list of requirements that can be used as a test to establish that a particular society should be regarded as a nation.

2.2 The concept of national identity

According to Anderson (1991) the nation, as opposed to the State, is itself an artificial imagined political community. It follows, therefore, that the notion of national identity exits only in people's minds. Turner (1984) reached a similar conclusion when she argued that "members of a nation do not interact with more than a small minority of their fellows". (1984: 521). She asserted, therefore, that "the members tend to define themselves and be defined by others as a nation" (1984: 521). Thus, like Anderson (1991), she priorities the sense in which national identity relies on people's perception of their situation. Turner's conclusion echo's other works based on social psychology. According to "The Social Identity Theory", for example, people have several different ways of describing and categorizing themselves. A person may identify themselves with a number of different groups at the same time. They can feel part of a racial group but also part of a sub-grouping, for example a woman's group. Examples of multiple group identity were provided by Hutnik (1991), where he describes the process of switching on and off behaviour. He claims that self-categorizations 'act as switches' that turn on (or off) aspects of social identity (cited in Billig, 1995: 69). For example, an Indian, British-born woman, in an Indian area of London, may use ethnic similarity to communicate with other members of the Indian community around her. On the other hand, when outside the country, she may categorize herself as being British and start to act like one neglecting aspects of her Indian identity. However, Billig (1995) sees the 'on - off switch' phenomena as a subtle one, which may occur without the person realising it is happening (1995: 69). Although it seems that Social Identity Theory provides some interesting arguments with regard to the understanding of group processes and group identity, it provides little understanding about group identifications with respect to national identity. Thus Billig (1995) claims that "Social Identity Theory has little to say about what happens to identity in between such national situations: it merely becomes some sort of latency, or

internalised cognitive scheme, within the individual's 'memory-store'; there it stays, awaiting activation when the next salient situation pops along" (1995: 69).

Parekh (1995) observes that most of the debate surrounding national identity is very vague. He claims that when we talk about national identity what we have in mind is a territorially organized 'community' or 'polity'. He defines the nation as a "homogeneous and collectively self-conscious ethno-cultural unit, a spiritual whole that shapes the substance and identity of its members" (Parekh, 1995: 254). For many people, he argues, when they talk about national identity, what they literally mean is a polity. He strongly objects to the use of the word 'national identity', suggesting it should be replaced by the term 'collective identity of the polity' in order to avoid the association of the word identity with the terms nation or national. Parekh (1995) identifies four common uses of the term 'identity', namely identity as to difference, identity as to self-understanding, identity as to cherishing values, and identity as to inner constitution (1995: 256-257). He rejects the first three uses of the term and endorses the fourth. He notes that "our identity refers to who we are, how we are constituted, what makes us the kind of persons we are". Parekh defines national identity as follows:

> "National identity refers to the way a polity is constituted, to what makes it the kind of community it is. It includes the central organizing principles of the polity. Its structural tendencies, characteristic ways of thinking and living, the ideals that inspire its people, the values they profess and to which its leaders tend to appeal, the kind of character they admire and cherish, their propensities to act in specific ways, their deepest fear, ambitions anxieties, collectives memories, traumatic historical experiences, dominant myth and collectives self understandings."
>
> (Parekh, 1995: 257).

Parekh (1995) further argues that as national identity is an elusive notion and far too complex to be understood in a simple manner, it therefore has a large number of grey areas. Thus national identity is not fixed but is a concept, which changes to meet new demands in the community (1995: 267).

Over the years, as will be further demonstrated shortly, there have been a number of attempts at defining the concept of national identity. It must be acknowledged that it is an extremely complex and elusive concept. The starting point is firstly to establish that a 'national identity' exists at all and, secondly, if it does exist, to establish the function and purpose, if any, of the concept.

2.2.1 General acceptance of the phenomenon of national identity

Regarding the existence of the phenomena, it is arguable that since the nation state as we know it is a relatively modern political construct, national identity is not inherent in humankind, though it may well be an integral part of modern life. Miller (1995) asserts that the idea of a nation to which people owe allegiance/loyalty emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (1995: 154).

Since there can be few people today who live outside the confines of a nation state, stateless refugees being one of the few exceptions, national identity is capable of being an inherent attribute of modern life. Most people, if asked, would be able and willing to describe themselves as being nationals of a state. Indeed, a large amount of official form filling, such as applications for passports and a driving license, will require the applicant to record his or her nationality. As Billig (1995) points out, "National identity is not only something which is thought to be natural to possess, but also something natural to remember" (1995: 37). There are exceptions to this generalization, such as the stateless refugee, but they do not significantly detract from the general proposition, that having a national identity is an integral part of modern life. Even if this is not so, as Geller (1983:

6) acknowledges, the assertion that the possession of a national identity is an integral part of life is now so common that it appears for all intents and purposes to be accepted as being an established social reality.

Billig (1995) would go further and assert that modern nation states daily reproduce themselves as nations and their citizenry as nationals, such as through official statements and declarations, so that a sense of national identity has become a mundane, ordinary fact in contemporary times. In particular, this process is not limited to times of crisis. Indeed, the "intermittent crisis depend upon existing ideological foundations" (1995:5). Implicit within the sovereignty of every state is membership of the state by its citizens, that is, as nationals of that state endowed with a sense of loyalty to the state.

This is not to say, however, that simply because an individual is a citizen of a state and has an official national identity, that the individual is necessarily ideologically at one with the general perception of what amounts to being a national of that state. It is perfectly possible for an individual to feel alienated from the state and what it stands for, or equally to be untouched and unaffected by it in his or her daily life. Thus, official citizenship does not necessarily include the possession of a sense of national identity.

Triandafyllidou (1998) criticizes the nationalist account that regards the notion of national identity as an ideal relationship. She argues that it is too simplistic to say national identity either exists or does not exist. She demonstrates this by examining the assertion that "Either a group of people share some specific features, be they civic or ethnic in character, that make of them a nation or they do not" (1998: 598). This statement, according to her, is highly misleading. She asserts that national identity, as an expression of the sense of belonging to a particular nation, is a tool for describing relative relationships. In her words, "It makes sense only to the extent that it is contrasted with the feelings that members of the nation have towards foreigners. Fellow nationals are not simply very close or close enough to one another, they are *closer* to one another than they are to outsiders"

(1998: 599). Thus, she claims that the notion of national identity can be considered as having a 'double edged' character, defining both those who belong to the community (inclusive) and those who do not (exclusive). On the one hand it is inward-looking, producing a shared identity within the group that binds members of the nation together. On the other hand, national identity highlights the existence of groups who differ from the nation and the individuals within it. Thus, unlike most other academics, who accept the concept of national identity, even if there is no general agreement as to what amounts to national identity, for Triandafyllidou, the term 'national identity,' in and by itself has no clear meaning at all (1998: 598-599).

In conclusion, the question of individual affinity to the state apart, it would appear that there is general if not total agreement between academics that the concept of national identity exists as a common, self-evidencing phenomena. Geertz's (1994) functional definition of nationalism assumes the existence of national identity as self-evident (1994: 29-34). Geertz (1994) identifies two contradictory and competing functions of national identity, namely self-identity, providing the individual with a recognized identity based on ethnicity, and a civic function entitling the individual to the benefits of being a member of an economically viable and efficient state. However, the mere fact that a sense of national identity is a reality in people's lives and exists, tells us little about what it is. Perhaps a further exploration of the functions of the concept of national identity can shed more light on what amounts to national identity.

2.3 Functions of the concept of national identity

The concept of national identity fulfils a number of functions. The many and varied definitions of national identity arise out of the fact that different people have explored different applications of the concept and the function informs the definition. What then are the functions fulfilled by national identity?

The concept of national identity acts as a mechanism of self-definition, enabling individuals to fix their place in the social world, to know who they are and how they should behave (Miller, 1995: 156). National identity uniquely supplies "the members of contemporary societies with a map that enables them to make sense of their surroundings" (1995: 157). This function operates from the bottom upwards. That is, as Miller points out, it forces those in power to conform to and operate within the constraints imposed upon them by the aspirations and common expectations of the people (who, at least within democratic society, have put them in a position of power). Whilst governments may not adhere to their electoral mandate, the government that acts contrary to the will of the people does so at its own peril. It is not uncommon for governments to make policy u-turns, where public opinion has demonstrated that the government has lost touch with the will of the people.

Within the context of Malaysia, and particularly in respect of government policy on the concept of national identity, the u-turn performed by Onn Jaafar, the first UMNO president is noteworthy. The British had initially proposed the Malayan Union Project in 1946 but this was replaced by the British supported Federation of Malaya Agreement in 1948, which recognized a provincial-based traditional Malay polity and deprived the new state of any concept of nation as such. In order to fill this vacuum, and despite opposing the original Union Project (in the main because it had been seen to come from the British and so was opposed as a matter of course, rather than principle), Jaafar attempted to turn UMNO into a multi-ethnic party based on the 'plural society nation' idea. UMNO members rejected his concept of a plural society nation and he was forced to resign, and was replaced by Tunku Abdul Rahman. He adopted Onn Jaafar's rhetoric by recognising the interests of other ethnic groups, but advocated a 'Malay UMNO' which emphasized the primacy of Malay ethnic interests (Shamsul, 1996a: 487).

A strong sense of national identity, linked to nationalism, provides a potent force for the creation and maintenance of a democratic and self-determining people, operating at the creational stage from the bottom upwards. National identity in this respect functions as a cornerstone of representative government and constitutes evidence of the existence of a nation-as-people whom it is commonly assumed are, by the fact of their existence, entitled to have their nation-as-state (Billig, 1995:24). Once a nation state has come into being, national identity is central to and reinforces the authority and power of the establishment and, in particular, legitimises the democratic credentials of the modern state. Unlike the self-defining function, the authority function operates top-down, from government to the people. It usually follows that a national consensus is created and maintained by the government, which successfully, if only for a short time, shapes or conditions the way the people view themselves as a people.

National identity is also a socio-political tool of those who, whilst not in authority, seek to reform and shape society to reflect their aims and interests. In common with the self-defining function of national identity, this function of national identity operates from bottom to top, or more likely from the centre or middle ground of the non-governing intellectual elite. To clarify, Shamsul (1996a: 478) highlights the importance of those who, whilst outside political office, nonetheless shape official concepts of national identity within the authority defined social reality category. Shamsul expressly reserves his 'everyday social reality' category for those hopefuls who as yet exercise no influence over the official version of national identity.

Arguably, the self-defining function has no real social significance beyond the individual. In the context of broader society, the self-defining and socio-political functions are in fact one and the same, since when a group self-defines itself, it does so in the context of its hopes and aspirations for society. The socio-political function therefore is nothing more than a mechanism by which the self-defining function operates at a national level, and

correlates to Shamsul's (1996a: 477) 'everyday defined social reality' until the time arrives when it influences central policy, at which stage it becomes authority so defined. In this sense, he proposes that identity formation takes place within a 'two social reality' context. It involves 'authority -defined social reality' which is authoritatively defined by people in the dominant political power structure and 'everyday-define social reality', the latter being a reality experienced by the people in the course of their everyday lives (1996a: 477).

Common to all of the perspectives of national identity outlined to this point in the discussion are a number of features. However, the various viewpoints will naturally place greater or lesser emphasis on different features that best illustrate, justify and provide a rationale for the function of national identity that they seek to establish and support. Arguably there are two basic viewpoints taken as to what amounts to national identity, namely 'everyday-defined' (Shamsul,1996a) or 'life-experience' national identity and 'authority-defined' (Shamsul,1996a) national identity. These respective viewpoints reflect the two central functions of national identity identified above, namely the self-definition function and the authority function.

2.3.1 National Identity and awareness of a broader society

In order to possess a sense of national identity, as opposed to simply being a national of a state, as outlined in 2.2.1 above, the individual has to be conscious of the existence of the nation state. This is not to say that the individual has to think about the matter on a daily or routine basis. Thus, Gellner (1993) asserts that nationalism is based upon a principle which is "very widely held and even more commonly taken for granted in the modern world" (1993: 409). In this sense Billig (1995: 69) asserts that indeed, unless the need arises, many individuals will not be pre-occupied by the notion or concept at all, since national identity is not normally a significant factor in daily life for the majority of people. Whilst national identity may not be at the forefront of their minds and they are unlikely to be actively conscious of it, as demonstrated at 2.2.1 above, the individual will be

subconsciously aware of it and be able to recall his or her national identity as and when required to do so.

In my view, it is worthwhile considering how the individual achieves an awareness of the national community, as a base point for defining the meaning of national identity. An awareness or consciousness of the wider national community requires a method of communicating to the individual the existence of that wider community and what it stands for or represents. Media are regarded, as Heidt (1987: 3) argues, "as instruments of enculturation, which contribute to the shaping of a social identity." In this respect, he adds, "television has often been described as a language" (1987: 3). Thus, in the modern world of telecommunications, an acquisition of a broad sense of community is facilitated by the images of a unified national community by television, which is precisely the focus of this thesis in the context of current Malaysian society. The Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr Mahathir, described the introduction of a second television channel to Malaysia as "an invaluable investment for the concept of national unity" (Lohman, 1983, cited in Heidt, 1987: 22). Technology and television are also central to the implementation of Dr. Mahathir's 1991 declared Vision 2020[2], which amongst other things seeks to establish a "Bangsa Malaysia" or Multi-cultural Malaysian Nation within Malaysia (Shamsul, 1996a: 484).

Mass awareness of the concept of the nation in times gone by, as Anderson (1991:37) points out, relied upon mass written communication through books, broad-sheets, pamphlets and more recently newspapers, which in turn required a high degree of literacy among the people. The development of the nation was further assisted by the development and use of vernacular print language, according to Poole (1999: 68). The nationalist movements involved in the creation France, as described by Billig (1995), provide a striking example of the power of communication in the forging of citizenship, loyalty and national identity to the nation state (1995: 24-29).

Given that the individual is able to sense the existence of this wider community to which they feel a sense of belonging, the question arises as to what image the individual formulates of the community. Since the community is an abstract construct, with no fixed measurable features, it is inevitable that this image will mirror the various messages conveyed in print and more recently by audio/visual media. The mass media system is one of the central features of Anderson's concept of 'the imagined community' (1991:6) with out which the individual who lacks any personal or intimate knowledge of the others within the community is able to become aware of their existence and to gain an understanding of what that community stands for and represents.

In conclusion, whilst a sense of national identity is multi-faceted and elusive, it appears that there are two central features, which operate independently but at the same time. Specifically, an awareness of a territorial group sense of communal belonging and a state-orientated notion of national identity and common economic and political aspirations. As long as these two features do not conflict, the nation is likely to be strong and secure. If they are not compatible, the nation is likely to be a fragile and vulnerable to disintegration and internal conflict. As will be demonstrated in Part II later, this mirrors the current situation in Malaysia where there appears to be a conflict between the 'authority-defined' version of national identity contained in the NCP and the perceived alternative definitions of national identity within the wider community.

2.4 Ideological view-points on the concept of national identity

The 'life-experience' of national identity is established through shared or common day-to-day activities, which help to create a sense of collective identity. Drawing from an anthropological perspective, Anderson (1991) asserts that this 'life-experience' of national identity is made possible through the process of 'imagining communities' to foster the growth of national consciousness. It is important to note that Anderson concentrates on a very specific period of time, namely that which covers the emergence of a sense of national

identity in a community through to the time that that community fulfils its aspirations and matures into a nation. For Anderson (1991) "Nationalism is at its most potent when the revolutionary successfully takes control" (1991:159). To this extent, therefore, Anderson does not provide a distinct and separate concept of national identity from that of the 'authority' based definition. However, subsequent academics, as outlined below, develop Anderson's concept and apply it, with subtle variations, as a mechanism for achieving a sense of national identity, which may in some way be distinct from that of the State. The great value of Anderson's work is in its construction of an alternative mechanism for perceiving or sensing national identity, which later analysts have been able to adapt and expand upon.

Anderson claims that the nation as an imagined community, "It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (1991: 6). It is thus asserted that the fellow members of the imagined community, regardless of the fact that they do not know each other and have never met, share this feeling. The imagined community is constrained by boundaries, however widely drawn (1991: 7).

Anderson's immediate concern, after setting out the basis of his concept of imagined community, was to discern the power relations which may induce so many people to kill, and more significantly to die, for the imagined community. In his discussion of the concept of national identity, Poole (1999), echoing Anderson, poses the question as to what is so important about national identity that it can result in huge sacrifices of human life. Poole (1999) answers this by drawing on the understanding of the nation expressed by Herder (1969) for whom nation is constituted through its language and culture. Herder emphasizes the significance of practices, customs and rituals of everyday life, and of the stories, folk beliefs and myths in terms of which people make sense of their lives (cited in

Poole, 1999: 68). Historical heroes provide examples of self-sacrifice, and also a form of imagined peer pressure which demands emulation. Similarly, without expressly so saying, Anderson (1991) implies that the imagined community demands loyalty from the members of its community. Anderson (1991: 141) addresses this point in a more direct manner where he ponders why nations inspire love and self-sacrificing as evidenced by cultural products such as poetry, prose, music and art. He suggests that indicators of national identity will include concepts of kinship, motherland, homeland and will draw upon a relationship to nature and a natural sense of being by referring to the nation as mother earth. These indicators provide a valuable analytical tool for this thesis.

Tajfel (1981), a leading socio-psychologist working in the area of 'Social Identity Theory', that is to say, the study of group processes and group identity, adopts Emerson's view, developed in 1960. Emerson considered that people become connected to the nation when they become a "body of people who feel that they are a nation" (1981: 229). This requires a very positive common sense of attachment and ownership as in the type of statement that starts with the words: "We the people ....." or "We the xxx believe in ...." Turner (1984) similarly prioritises the sense in which national identity relies on people's perception of their situation. In this sense, she argues that the important feature of group membership is the ability of a collection of people to define themselves and be defined by others, as a group (1984:518).

Interestingly, Poole (1999) argues national identity is determined by birth and upbringing and that this continuity becomes a pervasive and important feature in our lives. These include the language we speak, the culture we identify with and political responsibilities we cannot deny (1999: 73). He argues that people's identity develops in the social environment in which they live (1999: 66). Thus, identity is closely connected to a sense of community. An individual, according to Poole, will adopt an identity that suits the activities of the community they live in. He also notes that "one's self-interest will be

furthered as one acts in the interest of the group to which one belongs" (1999: 66) in that if the group prospers, each member of the group gains a personal benefit. In this sense, Hogg and Abrams (1988: 172) assert that there are several steps involved in the process of group identification. The first step involves the individual in categorising himself or herself as apart from other groups. Next, they start to learn more about what the group they have joined appears to be like. Finally, they start to emulate the stereotypes in this group so as to make themselves even more like those already in the group.

Whilst the concept of national identity is complex, it is clear that the idea of reconstitution and reinvention of a sense of belonging to a particular nation with common shared history, culture and experience of its community, is an important factor. In this sense, there is common ground between Anderson (1991), Tajfel (1981), Turner (1984) Poole (1997), all of whom assert that societies and individuals create and inhabit their own sense of national identity. This living experience embeds the individual as a member of his or her community through a common or shared territory, culture, language, myths and historical memories, creating a sense of belonging to a particular nation. There is a distinction, however, between what is required to establish a new sense of national identity in the revolutionary period leading up to the creation of a nation state, and what is involved in teasing out what amounts to national identity in an established community.

In the Malaysian context, Shamsul (1996a:476) recognizes four critical challenges involved in the study of identity, namely: (1) The 'conceptual' challenge of how to perceive identity either as a static, ready made, taken for granted, given concept or as a dynamic perpetually changing concept; (2) 'describing and explaining' the emergence, consolidation and change of identities over time; (3) the 'analytical' challenge arising out of the 'theoretical identity' problem created by the re-thinking of social theory from functionalism to structuralism to post-structuralism; and (4) the 'authorial' problem of remaining objective and avoiding the subjectivity trap. Whilst there is widespread

recognition of the existence of 'life-experience'/ 'everyday-defined social reality' as previously mentioned above (see 2.3), empirically speaking, evidence of what is experienced in people's minds is difficult to collect, collate and hence analyse. Shamsul observes that evidence of 'everyday-defined social reality' takes the form of cartoons, songs, poems, short stories, rumours, gossip, and 'letters to the editor' in newspapers. It is a form of hearsay evidence, subjective in nature (1996a: 478). For Shamsul, the fact that it is subjective is no reason to reject it. The only requirement is that the analyst adopts an impartial approach to it. Indeed, to ignore it is a form of political exclusion of the voices from below, that is to say, to ignore the message being sent out to the governors by the governed. Despite the importance of 'everyday-defined social reality', Shamsul then concentrates on examining 'authority-defined social reality'.

The alternative to national identity through living experience is the defining of national identity by and for the people by the authorities, or in convenient short hand terms, 'authority-defined national identity'. Shamsul (1996a) refers to 'authority-defined social reality' as a reality 'defined by people who are part of the dominant power structure', unlike 'everyday-defined social reality' which is experienced by those outside this structure (1996a:477). Hobsbawam (1983) and Miller (1995) have similarly demonstrated that the ruling elite creates the notion of national identity. This perspective asserts that national identity is shaped and defined by authorities, as a tool of control to form a cohesive and governable society. The definition passed down to and imposed on the people by the elite will include elements of loyalty to the state in exchange for social stability, in terms of 'law and order' and 'appropriate' cultural attitudes. This imposition provides and reinforces an emotional attachment to the state and is significant in the production of 'good loyal law-abiding citizens'. The individual who refuses to conform may fall back on the life-experience model of national identity.

Hobsbawam (1983) understood the nation in terms of 'invented traditions', which suggests that the notion of identity is essentially a process of formalization and reutilization, characterized by reference to the past. He further argued that the processes of formalization and reutilization were deliberately invented and constructed by the single initiators, namely via the elite's organization of the State (1983:1).

Shamsul (1996a) points out that the discourse in an 'authority-defined' context is textualised, both in published and unpublished forms. Even the oral form is usually recorded, either in printed form (official reports, policy documents, newspaper reports, books, magazines, academic journals, photographs, etc) or, more recently, in audio-visual electronic form and hence is available for reference and analysis (1996a: 478). The discourse is not homogenous; it is characterised by vigorous and tense discussions between social groups representing different interests. Shamsul acknowledges that the Malaysian Government's definition of social reality is not universally accepted by all of the ethnic groups within Malaysia. He argues that presently Malaysia is, in effect, a 'nationless' state currently in the process of seeking to create a united Malaysian nation (1996a: 484). In a broad economic sense, it is a coherent variant of a capitalist entity. He writes:

> "...but in the political and ideological sense it is still searching for a parallel coherence because there exist strong competing nations-of intent, or a "second generation nationalism", hence the debate on identity, especially national identity, is still widely open."
>
> (Shamsul, 1996a: 484).

Whilst the function of 'authority-defined national identity' is well understood and the symbols used to convey and reinforce the concept are well known and clearly identifiable, there can be no single definition of what the resultant identity is, since it is specific to each

nation to which it applies. Therefore, rather than seek to define, in a general manner, the indefinable, the concept needs to be further examined in the context of Malaysia.

2.5 Conclusions

The discussions on the concept of national identity outlined above indicate the elusive nature of the idea of national identity. As Shamsul (1996a: 482) states: "The question of identity and 'the national' in Malaysia, or 'national identity', remains contested to this day." Nonetheless, drawing from the work of Anderson (1983) and Tajfel (1981), in my view the existence of a sense of national identity is an act of imagination and identification with other 'with-in' communities so as to generate a sense of belonging to the nation.

Poole (1999) suggests that linguistic and cultural resources are important elements for the articulation of the sense of 'self' in a community. For Heidt (1987), shared territory and historical memories for all members play an important role in developing a sense of natural belonging in particular nation. For Billig (1995), a sense of physical and emotion attachment contributes to a sense of national identity. Hobsbawam (1983) and Miller (1995) assert that national identity involves a process of the invention of a sense of citizenship by the state. However, Parekh (1995) identifies a lack of clarity associated with the concept of 'national identity' which is mainly associated with a territorially organized community, due to the fact that he believes that the concept of national identity involves the collective self-conscious of ethno-cultural units (rather than any geographically specific feature).

Whilst it may be too simple to describe national identity narrowly in terms of 'life-experience', or as being 'authority-defined', or as a combination of both, Billig (1995) asserts that because individuals do not actively think about the concept of national identity, the banality of it all means that national identity is taken for granted by many people. For him, national identity only becomes significant under special situations that

require the individual to start thinking of the process of self-identification to the nation. Even if Billig is correct in his assertion, this does not detract from the importance of the concept, it merely means it is more difficult to analyse the changes in society that come about from the gradual and often imperceptible way that national identity evolves and mutates.

Heidt (1987: 71) suggests that where "a collective (macro) identity is founded on a long and unbroken history it becomes such a natural part of everyday thinking that it does not have to concern itself with rational justifications as long as it is accepted." Heidt considers that a "time frozen" view of a nation's national identity is obsolete and that it is necessary to take an enlightened view of identity in modern complex plural societies. In this regard Shamsul (1996a: 477) discusses the interaction between 'everyday' and 'authority' defined identity in terms of 'Two Social Realities'. He states that: "Woven and embedded in the relationship between these 'two social realities' is social power, articulated in various forms such as a majority-minority discourse and state-contestation" (1996a: 478). Shamsul suggests that "the study of identity would be enriched tremendously by adopting this 'two social reality' approach because:

> "one would be in a position to capture the macro picture and the detailed internal micro dynamics in a more balanced manner (...) it encourages the analyst to allow the voices of the social actors to speak openly about their experience in contrast to the authority-defined one which is based on observation and interpretation".
>
> (1996a: 479).

The empirical research involved in this study does precisely this, in that it seeks to establish through interviews how the young adult Malaysian's perceive their sense of national identity, irrespective of its source, be it 'everyday experience' or 'authority

defined'. Whilst the ultimate objective is to evaluate the role that television has played in the young adults' self-understanding of national identity, analysis requires the ability to identify key indicators of what is involved in the concept. These are evident from the various academic sources reviewed above and provide a key to understanding the degree to which, if at all, the subjects have developed a sense of national identity. The nature of that sense will likewise throw light on the question as to whether or not it is a 'life-experience' or 'authority-defined version'. By considering the extent to which, in the minds of the participants, television projects and represents these various perspectives, it should be possible to reach some tentative conclusions on the impact of television on the young adults' perceptions.

2.6 Part II: Seeking Malaysian national identity

This section commences with a socio-geographical and historical review of the region, focussing on developments since the 16th century. The period before that, in my view, is of less significance to the current study[3]. This review seeks to outline some significant events in the history of Malaysia and places into perspective the factors that contributed to the introduction of National Culture Policy. The second part of this section examines viewpoints regarding the National Cultural Policy, which was an attempt at nation-building through the formation of national identity in Malaysia.

2.6.1 Socio-geographical and historical review

Malaysia[4] covers an area of about 329,758 square kilometres, consisting of the Peninsular Malaysia also known as West Malaysia, with twelve states and East Malaysia, which consists of Sabah, Sarawak and the Federal Territory of Labuan. The two regions are divided by 540 kilometres of the South China Sea. Peninsular Malaysia has frontiers with Thailand in the North and Singapore[5] in the South. Meanwhile Sabah, Sarawak and the

Federal Territory of Labuan border on the territory of Indonesia's Kalimantan (Malaysia,1997:1).

Malaysia is located between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Its strategic position has long attracted the traders and merchants travelling from east to west across the world. Islam was established in the fifteenth century. In 1511 the Portuguese arrived in Malacca, followed by the Dutch in 1641. Sir Francis Light arrived in Penang in 1786 and by 1815 the British displaced the Dutch as rulers. Thereafter through treaties, relentless political pressure and diplomacy, the British slowly extended their control over all the states of The Peninsular. Sabah and Sarawak were ruled by the British from 1888. By the 1920s, all the states were under British control (The Information Malaysia Year Book,1995a).

Given the wide variety of foreign forces that have set foot in Malaysia, it is not surprising that the outstanding characteristic of Malaysia's population today is its highly variegated ethnic mix. In consequence Malaysia is probably one of the most multi-racial societies in the world. Malaysia consists of multi-ethnic population with three major ethnic groups, namely Malay, Chinese and Indian and various ethnic minorities, including the indigenous from Sabah and Sarawak.

According to the 1998 census, the population of Malaysia was 22,179,500. This was made up as follows. The Bumiputera numbered 12,842,800, and the Chinese 5,515,400. There were 1,562,300 people of Indian origin and the remainder numbered 2,259,100 (Statistics Department, 1999).

Broadly speaking, Malaysia's ethnic groups fall into two main categories, namely the Bumiputera, which is made up of Malays and other indigenous groups, and non-Bumiputera, meaning the Chinese, Indian and similar migrant groups (Zaharom, 1996: 157). There are several distinctions within the Bumiputera groups. The two broad

categories are the aborigines (orang asli) who can rightly claim to be the oldest element of the Peninsular population, and the Malay related. The Malay related include those Malays long settled in the country, mostly the Malays of the East Coast of the peninsular, in Sabah, Sarawak and those who crossed the Straits of Malacca from Sumatra in the early twentieth centuries. Other ethnic groups include the Javanese whose main domain is the western coast of Johor, Selangor and Lower Perak, the Banjarese, the Boyanese, the Bugis, the Bajau of Sabah and the Muningkabau. These groups assimilated into the Malay community as a result of common cultural traits and above all the bonding force of Islam (The Information Malaysia Year Book, 1995b).

The non-Malay Bumiputera category consists of ethnic groups found in Sarawak and Sabah with the largest single ethnic group being the Ibananese in the former, and the Kadazan (Dusun) in the latter. Others include the Bidayuh (Land Dayaks), the Melanau, the Kenyah, the Kayan and the Bisayah in Sarawak. In Sabah other ethnic groups include the Murut, the Kelabit, and the Kedayan (The Information Malaysia Year Book, 1995c).

The Chinese population of Malaysia is derived largely from South China, with the Cantonese and the Hokkien forming the largest dialect groups. They are quite different from the unique Chinese Baba community of Malacca, who can trace their ancestry back to the sixteenth century. The Indian population are derived mainly from Tamil speaking Indians from the Southern part of India and Sri Lanka. They form the largest dialect group after the Hindi or Urdu speaking Indians from the North. The Sikhs and the Malayalees are also significant minorities. The Indian Muslim communities of Penang, like the Chinese Baba, trace their ancestry to sixteenth century Gujerati traders (The Information Malaysia Year Book, 1995c).

The Chinese and Indian contacts with Malaysia go back to the dawn of history, but there was no substantial permanent settlement of these peoples in the country until the twentieth

century. The reason for the mass immigration of the Chinese and Indians was because of the impact of the forces of the Industrial Revolution and the laissez-faire policies pursued by the new British colonial administration in the Straits Settlement. The Chinese found opportunities for investment and labour in the expanding tin mining industry and the Indians worked primarily as agricultural labourers on coffee plantations and later on the rubber estates. The imposition of immigration control in 1931 reduced immigration drastically and the outbreak of the Second World War, coupled with Japanese occupation, effectively ended Chinese and Indian immigration (The Information Malaysia Year Book, 1995c).

During the colonial period, occupations were essentially ethnically-based. The British practised the concept of 'divide and rule' (Wan Hashim, 1983: 61). The Malays tended to live and work in the rural areas as farmers and fisherman. The Chinese, who were mostly involved in mining and business activities, occupied the urban areas. The Indians were employed on the rubber estates. The British engineered this fragmentation of the labour force in order to divide the population (Deraman, 1994; Wan Hashim, 1983). The British feared that a politically and socially united population would undermine their authority. The division has resulted in an uneven distribution of the country's wealth. The majority of the Chinese were largely based in the urban area and held control on the economy, whilst other ethnic groups had not been given any opportunity to improve their economic status/activity (Wan Hashim: 1983: 62-63). Furthermore, Wan Hashim (1983) pointed out that this division had resulted in minimal and superficial interaction between the various groups, limited mainly to business hours in the market place (1983:61).

2.6.2 Multi-culturalist forces and the NCP

Heidt (1987) claims that the need to develop concepts of national identity and belonging is most apparent in post-colonial countries such as Malaysia that have experienced large-scale immigration (1987: 115). He further asserts that that in many post-colonial states, the

process of nation building takes place after the creation of nation state (1987:129). Heidt also identified three approaches in which the concept of national identity and sense of belonging operates. The first is known as 'cultural assimilation' and involves the way that society reacts to the presence of the different cultural groups, which he describe as "cultural assimilation or integration". Cultural assimilation tends to result in the domination of majority cultures over minority cultures. He asserts that the Malaysian National Culture Policy fits into this category (1987:115). The second approach known as 'cultural separatism' involves the idea of restricted interactions between different cultural groups. The two countries that used to practice separatism between majority and minority groups were South Africa and Nazi Germany. The contrast to cultural assimilation and separatism is 'cultural pluralism' where different ethnic groups are not segregated and none of the groups is considered superior to others (1987: 116).

Multiculturalism provides a more democratic approach. Heidt (1987) asserts that achieving multiculturalism is a difficult complex process and success cannot be assured. He identifies four pitfalls to this approach. He argues that for the approach multiculturalism to work, it requires a high degree of tolerance, particularly the ability to accept positive aspects of other cultures. It demands that each cultural group gives up or at least places less emphasis on typical positive in-group stereotypes and relates more to negative out-groups stereotypes (1987:116). In most cases this is difficult to achieve as each ethnic group cherishes and values its own ethnic cultural identity. In the multi-culturalist approach, Heidt maintains that cultural differences are intentionally kept alive between the different ethnic groups. The danger, he claims is that it could result in over-emphasizing cultural uniqueness and differences and, at the same time placing too high a value on changes and deviations in culture. Another problem with multiculturalism, he notes, is the possibility of one cultural group becoming dominant, causing the others to lose their relevance, and thereby corrupting folklore cultures. The other problem he identifies as a major obstacle to implementing a multi-culturist approach is the possibility

of suppressing or destroying cultural pluralism in an attempt to connect and retain the different cultures of ethnic groups. It entails an adaptive practice for all cultures, which involves a delicate and complex balancing process between a degree of separateness and necessary integration that is a very difficult task to carry out. The failure to 'adapt' and 'balance' may result in conflicts between the dominant culture group and the minority groups (1987: 116).

It has long been accepted that in multi-ethnic, post-colonial societies like Malaysia, there has often been a struggle for political power between dominant ethnic groups; in this instance the Malays and the Chinese (Wan Hashim 1983; Kua 1987; Shamsul 1996a). The issue of national identity in Malaysia took on greater significance in 1971 with the creation of a National Cultural Policy (NCP). The government considered that developing a national culture was central to the building of the nation. The need to create a national identity was, in reality, an admission that before that time there was no clearly defined notion of what being a Malaysian meant, apart from the fact that a person happened to be a citizen of Malaysia by virtue of residence. If the characteristics of the typical Malaysian had been self-evident then no policy to create such a national identity would have been needed. The choice for the government was either to accord recognition of the predominant group as typifying the typical Malaysian or alternatively to attempt to construct an identity out of the whole population. In order to bind the population together, the government claimed to choose the latter course of action. Unfortunately, reality did not comply with rhetoric. There was a tendency, as the policy was implemented, to select the culture of the dominant Islamic Malays as being representative of Malaysian identity. After a while other ethnic groups started to raise objections to the direction that the policy was taking.

The policy was adopted at a time when Malaysian's second largest ethnic group, the Chinese, and the third largest group, the Indians, who together were entering into their

third Malaysian born generation, started to develop a desire for a sense of belonging. They started to resent being treated as second-class citizens. These groups together held a relatively strong position in Malay society, especially the Chinese who had established themselves as a major commercial force in the country. Noor Bathi (1996) states that the 1980's were a period, which presaged unequivocal demands from the Chinese, Indian and other minority group for cultural equality. This led to the promotion of a concept of national integration, but, at the same time, required that the newly formed national culture embrace characteristics of all the respective cultures. The argument behind the policy was, and remains, that cultural diversity, identity and democracy provide the proper basis for national integration and would lead to inter-communal understanding (1996:142-143). The parallel with the racial 'melting pot' analogies used to describe the cultural evolution of the United States is striking. These groups, the Chinese and the Indians, wholeheartedly embraced the notion of multiculturalism, which was implicit in the NCP.

The concept underlying a national identity policy was formulated in 1957 immediately after Malaysia achieved independence. It was not until the May 13 riots in 1969 however, that the government started to actively pursue the policy. Indeed, Deraman (1994) asserts that the creation of integration in Malaysia has become complex and difficult due to the attitude of the colonials, who created fragmentation and never paid any serious attention to promoting inter-ethnic relationships (1994:180). Thus it is not surprising that it was pointed out that the reason for the riots in 1969 was due to a sense of insecurity and mistrust arising out of bad experiences between groups from different ethnic backgrounds, particularly between the Malay and Chinese (The National Operations Council Report, 1969; Ongkili, 1982; Wan Hashim, 1983; and Shamsul, 1999a).

One theory for the cause of the riots was that they were provoked by the victory marches of the opposition parties (DAP and Gerakan) in Kuala Lumpur on the 11th and 12th May after the general elections of 1969 (Ongkili, 1982: 203). The general election in that year

resulted in the ruling government failed to secure a two- thirds majority in Parliament. The Alliance (or government) party won only 66 seats of the 104 seats in the west of Malaysia. According to Ongkili (1982: 203): "...the processions were not only noisy but also provocative, arrogant and abusive". In a report by The National Operations Council, it was stated that: "The common features in all these were the complete and deliberate defiance of traffic regulations, vulgar and obscene language and gestures and deliberately provocative slogan attacking the Malays" (1969: 36). Due to the state of emergency in 1969, the general election in Sabah and Sarawak was postponed until 1970. When the results of the 1970 elections in Sabah and Sarawak were announced, the Alliance party won only 23 out of 40 parliamentary seats.[6] This unexpected victory was celebrated by the opposition in a form, which again gave offence to some Malays.

The behaviour of the opposition parties and their supporters upset the Malays. Some felt that there was little or no reason for the insults directed at them. Furthermore, the success of the opposition parties according to the Malays was small. The Malays claimed that they had more reason to celebrate due to the fact that they had won 133 seats at state level compared to 31 by the DAP and 26 by the Gerakan. According to the National Operation Council Report, the incident that caused the riots started in Setapak when some Malays were attacked by some Chinese.[7] The report also stated that:

> "...some Malays while proceeding to the assembly point on foot and scooters (as the local bus services had apparently stopped) were taunted in Setapak by groups of Chinese and Indians, and this developed rapidly into stone and bottle throwing incidents between opposing groups ten to fifteen minutes before the out break of violence in Kampung Baharu. It was news of this fight that sparked off the clashes in and around Kampung Baharu. The taunts and insults of the previous two days had only served to generate the explosive atmosphere".
>
> (The National Operations Council Report,1969: 49).

At first the police were called to break up the violence but the situation worsened, and the military was called in to assist the police in suppressing the riots. A curfew was declared in Kuala Lumpur at 8.00 pm on the 13th of May 1969 (Ongkili, 1982: 207-208). What is clear is that a blood bath ensued. A large number of both Chinese and Malays were killed. According to the National Operation Council Report, an estimated 2,000 people died during the disturbances.[8] The government regained its stability towards the end of the turbulent week (Ongkili, 1982). Malaysia could not afford another tragedy, and the policy of creating a multi-cultural national identity was seen as a way of preventing a recurrence of the riots.

Whilst the elections may have been the "straw that broke the camel's back" or the "spark that ignited the flames of racial disharmony", the problem in Malaysia was deeply rooted. Clearly there was a wide gulf between the aspirations and perceptions of Malays and Chinese, but at that time there were no serious disturbance previous to 1969.[9]

The 1969 ethnic disturbances had resulted in the creation of National Culture, National Economic Policy and National Ideology or 'Rukun Negara', to regain the country's stability and to forge integration across the different ethnic groups.

The National Economic Policy (NEP) was aimed at reducing and eradicating poverty across all ethnic groups in Malaysia; and to restructure Malaysian society in order to eliminate identification of race with economic status. The government believed that the attainment of equality and balance among different ethnic groups would contribute to economic growth and, furthermore, achieve national unity (Wan Hashim, 1987: 85)

Rukun Negara aimed to achieve integration and national unity in order to strengthen and legitimise the position of the authorities. There were five principles of the National Ideology, which are Belief in God, Loyalty to the King and Country, upholding the constitution, the rule of law, good behaviour and morality. The government hoped that

Rukun Negara, by energizing the economy, would lead to national unity on the assumption that low standards of living are a principal cause of conflict between different ethnic groups (Wan Hashim, 1983: 90).

The National Cultural Policy (NCP) was taken very seriously by the government and implemented as a matter of urgency after the riots. The policy aimed to strengthen national unity, to foster national identity, to enrich socio-economic structures and to strike a balance between 'humanity and spirituality'. The National Culture Policy had three basic parts, namely;

1) Measures were to be based on the indigenous culture of the region;

2) Elements from all cultures would form the National Culture;

3) Islam was to have an important role in moulding the National Culture.

(Malaysia, 1973, p.vii)

Whilst the policy provided for an accommodation with non-Malay culture, as demonstrated by the second parts of the policy, this was not meant to detract from the importance of the first and third parts of the policy (Zaharom, 1996 and Kua, 1987). The goal of the policy was not fulfilled, however. The Chinese and the Indian communities submitted joint memoranda in 1983 and again in 1984, voicing their dissatisfaction at the way the policy was implemented. They urged far greater participation for their communities in the development of the national culture, cultural democracy and cultural equality. They stated that they were not willing to become a subordinate culture. They claimed that the way that the NCP had been implemented up to that time had favoured only the dominant Malay culture, and had a tendency to suppress the cultures of the other ethnic groups in Malaysia (Kua, 1985 and 1987).

According to Francis Loh (1992), it was not only the Chinese and the Indians who demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the NCP. Other ethnic minorities, especially the non-Malay and non-Muslim communities of Sabah and Sarawak, had also voiced their grievances at being subordinate to the Malay Muslim hegemony. They claimed a distinct history and legal status as a definitive people. They maintained that their existence should receive some 'recognition' (cited in Noor Bathi, 1996:142).

The decision within the NCP to use the Malay language in public life was not well received by the Chinese, Indian and other minorities of Sabah and Sarawak. They felt that they were not free to develop their own languages as a symbol of their identity (M. Ikmal cited in Noor Bathi, 1996; and Karthigesu, 1994).

On the 22 and 23rd of March 1986, the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall (resource and research centre) hosted a two-day seminar about NCP aimed at providing an alternative view of the NCP. It had 11 participants from various ethnic and religions backgrounds in Malaysia. During the seminar a great deal of dissatisfaction was expressed about the NCP. These included questions of culture, language and religion as well as issues of representation during the formulation of the NCP.

According to Kua (1987) those who contributed to the formulation of the NCP were not ethnically representative of the whole of Malaysian society. He noted that of "the sixty or so working papers that were presented by cultural experts and intellectuals of sorts, barely a handful were non-Malays but even these were hardly representative of the non-Malay Communities. It clearly lacked democratic consensus" (1987: 2). Many of those who were not satisfied with the way that the National Culture Policy had been implemented suggested that in order for the state to create a viable national culture, ethnic culture had to play a significant role in its formation.

Kua, (1987) representing the Chinese view, addressed the problem of the lack of trust of non-Malays in the NCP, which was based on Malay centrism. Such a policy, he argued, could lead to the failure of nationhood (1987: 31). He regarded the nature of NCP as having a negative spirit of nationalism, which imposed standards of domination and subordination on and over ethnic minorities that did not contribute to positive and progressive strivings towards solidarity, freedom and democracy. He acknowledged colonial legacy that was responsible for the divisive society of Malaysia (1987: 37). For Kua (1987) culture is inseparable from freedom in which creative cultural activity demands freedom of expression (1987: 40). He asserted that in an attempt to develop national integration, all the good aspects in every ethnic culture must be preserved. He asserted that the authorities must play a crucial role in developing cultural expression including music, folk arts and other cultural aspects of the different ethnic groups (1987: 41).

According to Yew (1987), also representing the Chinese view, it is a basic human right for people to maintain their own identity. This right was formulated and endorsed by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in 1950 at Delhi. The general perception of ethnic minority cultures should, he argued, be positive not negative. The evolution of a national culture into a multi-ethnic culture is not so much a matter of according success to one or other of the competing ethnic groups, but rather of accommodating the culture of ethnic minorities within the core element of the national culture. He concluded that the "contribution of ethnic cultures to national culture is possible if the national leadership accepts the multi ethnic nature of the national community and regards it as an asset and a source of strength". More importantly, he asserted that "the national leadership must be truly committed to democratic principles" (1987:72-73).

Longanathan (1987), representing the Hindu view, introduced the concept of political philosophy or 'deiocracy'. It promotes freedom and gives importance to the individual so

that every citizen's psychological potential could be developed to the maximum, which is a democratic ideal. As a result, it will not seek to impose uniformity but stresses the ability of each culture to flourish and develop, so that each can take part in the process of developing national culture (1987:113-114).

Topin (1987) from Sabah, representing a non-Islamic Bumiputera view, asserts that NCP should reflect the history of the land and must be based on indigenous culture. At the same time it should recognise the existence of non-indigenous elements. He stressed the need for 'variety' in formulating national culture and upholding universal and fundamental values and the purposes of the existence of NCP, rather than social structures (1987:129). He asserted that all religions and cultures share most basic and fundamental reasons and aspirations for existence. This includes elements of spiritual being, social being, mental being, social being and the physical being. For him, national culture should be committed to providing social structure, legislation and respect to the five spiritual needs of the citizen (1987:130). However, he noted that religion, culture and the ethnic nature of Malaysian society posed obstacles to the establishment of a national culture (1987:132).

Representing the Islamic and Malay view was Mohd Noor. He first of all clarified the question about the concept of Islam within NCP, claiming that the other participants did not understand it properly. He asserted that by stipulating Islam as a core element did not mean that all non-Muslims would have to confirm to Islamic teaching. He asserted that Islam acknowledges the existence and the right of all people to practise their individual religions (1987:88-89). He added that the concept of Islam as the national religion is a principle and only applies to Muslims. He further asserted that Islam is a complete code of life (1987:85). In contrast with other participants, he generally approved of the formulation of NCP that adopts Islam and Malay as core elements. He argued that this is due to the fact that the Malay people were the first groups to set foot in the region (the Malay archipelago), so therefore they had the right to design the NCP. In addition, he

noted that the allowance for suitable elements from other groups to participate in the formulation of NCP above all suggested that NCP did not intrude on other cultures, beliefs and religions. Finally, he agreed that Islam should be given an important place in moulding NCP and should not contradict Islam (1987: 89).

A formulation of a national policy, which embraces everybody's cultural requirements and values, is not an easy task to fulfil in a multi-ethnic society. As James Masing (1987) from Sarawak argued, the danger inherent in formulating a single culture is that it may result in:

> "... a total sum or cultural agglomeration which has no real meaning to anybody and therefore, would not attract any sense of pride. Consequently the objective of establishing cultural uniformity around which people of different ethnic groups would revolve with the sense of belonging, does not exist. The need to have national culture for unity is lost and the whole exercise is wasted"
>
> (1987:136).

Masing therefore suggested that in order for the state to be able to create a truly Malaysian culture, it had to hold to the core culture that is the culture of the Malays which he saw as the most appropriate since they are the main ethnic group. It was thus logical, he argued to let the Malay culture form the central core of the national cultural policy. He pointed out, however, that this core element is subject to changes at different times and differing circumstances.

In one respect, Masing reinforces the view that the policy should remain unchanged. Alternatively, it could be considered that by making the cultural values of one group, albeit the marginally larger group, the central characteristic of national identity is divisive. Masing's solution to this dilemma is that with the passage of time the Malays must learn to be less prescriptive about the imposition of Islamic values on the rest of the community. Islam must not be overly stressed as a central feature of national culture. Rather it is the

culture of the Bumiputera, which must form the central core. This begs the question, of course, about what constitutes the residual culture of the Bumiputera? The answer arguably must be a merging of all the non-religious values of each of the groups into one.

2.6.3 Conclusions

In Malaysia, the 1971 officially sanctioned concept of national identity achieved its most coherent expression in the NCP, following the ethnic riots in 1969. However, the NCP failed to provide a sense of unity amongst the multi-ethnic society of Malaysia. This was due to the fact that some sections of the Malaysian community believed that the way NCP was formulated, with a concentration on the interests of the dominant Malay group, failed to give sufficient expression to their interests. Although there have been calls for re-consideration of the NCP, the policy has remained largely unchanged.

In the light of widespread criticism of the way NCP was formulated and implemented in Malaysia, the government has taken some steps to achieve a sense of national unity. The government has embarked on a policy of projecting Malaysia as a modern-state that its people can be proud of. It is submitted that the Commonwealth Games 1998 illustrate a good example of this policy. The Government provided superb facilities for the games, which have been a source of pride for all Malaysians. The massive degree of support for the Malaysian athletes at the games seemingly united all groups in society. It may be observed that the localization of ethnic populations in different parts of the capital City, Kuala Lumpur, has started to be broken up. Prior to 1971, Indians lived primarily in Brickfields, the Chinese lived mostly in Bukit Bintang and the Malays were concentrated in Kampung Baru. Today each of these areas exhibits a far greater degree of mixed racial occupancy. It is apparent that the current trend towards the privatisation of the Universities has improved access to higher education for the non-Bumiputera. Whilst the Bumiputera still retain a considerable number of privileges not available to the non-Bumiputera, the economic and educational gap between the Bumiputera and the non-

Bumiputera has narrowed considerably since 1971. This demonstrates that Dr Mahathir's Vision 2020, announced in 1991 as a successor to the NCP, is starting to have a beneficial effect.

END NOTES

[1] For further reading , see Shamsul (1996a) page 485.

[2] Vision 2020 aimed at establishing Malaysia as a fully developed country in terms of national unity and social cohesion, economy social justice, political stability, system of government, quality of life, social and spiritual values, national pride and confidence. See Mahathir (1996).

[3] For further reading on the early history of Malaysia, refer to Deraman (1994).

[4] Previously known as Malaya, it changed its name to Malaysia in 1963. For further reading, refer to Ongkili (1982).

[5] Singapore was a part of Malaysia before separating itself in 1965 to form independent states on its own. For further reading, refer to Ongkili (1982).

[6] For an extended discussion with detailed results from the general election in 1969, refer to Ongkili (1982).

[7] For an extended chronology of the May 13th tragedy, see National Operation Council Report, 1996.

[8] For detailed statistic relating to the emergency throughout the country from 13 May to 31 July, 1969, see National Operation Council Report (especially pages 88-96).

[9] See Ongkili, 1982: 208; and National Operation Council Report, 1969, pages 1-19.

- Chapter Three -

Television in Malaysia

3.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a summary of key moments in the history of Malaysian television. The chapter describes the events leading up to 1998 in order to provide a context for the study's focus on the relationship between young adult Malaysians and television.

The **First Phase** of the chapter reviews the history of Malaysian broadcasting from 1921, when radio was first brought into the country, and shows how the first Prime Minister encouraged the development of television after the country gained its independence in 1957. The **Second Phase** examines the preparation process for television, leading to the launch of "The First Channel," whilst also tracing the developments in programming and issues surrounding the introduction of television. The **Third Phase** explores the beginnings of "The Second Channel" and the introduction of colour television. The **Fourth Phase** discusses the relationship between the introduction of the Privatization Policy in 1980 and the privatization of television in Malaysia. The **Fifth Phase** describes the subsequent developments of broadcasting institutions in Malaysia, up to 1998. This part also includes an account of the development of cable and satellite television and of the latest phase of expansion of terrestrial television in 1998. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the relationship between the Malaysian government and the broadcasting industry. This is undertaken from two perspectives, firstly the ownership and control of television in Malaysia and secondly, the legislation and directives employed to regulate television in Malaysia.

3.1 The first phase (1921-1962): Planning for television

Broadcasting in Malaysia[1] began approximately eighty years ago with the introduction of radio during the British occupation. Radio was brought to Malaysia by a British electrical engineer serving in Johore in 1921 and later expanded between 1930 and 1937 across the country. At the time, radio services were used as an entertainment medium and were run by amateurs (Ministry of Information, nd a; Karthigesu, 1994b).

Between 1942 and 1945, the Japanese occupied the country and the radio services were used for propaganda purposes. After the Japanese left in 1946, the British Colonial Government returned and established the Department of Broadcasting. In 1948, in response to the challenge of Communism, the government declared a state of emergency[2] and as Karthigesu (1987, 1988, 1994a, 1994b), suggest used the radio services to strengthen their power in Malaysia. This eventually resulted in a well-developed radio service throughout the country, which in some parts still exists today[3].

The achievement of independence in 1957[4] meant that the broadcasting system was handed over to the new government, ruled by the Alliance Party. The Alliance party was a coalition of the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), and the Malaysian India Congress (MIC), and was formed in 1955[5] in preparation for Malaysian Independence. This Alliance Party was largely representative of three ethnic groups: the Malay, the Chinese and the Indians (Ongkili, 1982). This political organization still exists and forms the current Malaysian government[6]. According to Zaharom, since independence the Alliance Party has won every general election (2000:139-140). The broadcasting structure established by the British passed to the new government without any fundamental changes. In respect of Malaysian radio at the time of independence, Karthigesu (1987) stated that:

"There was a strongly built-in partiality towards people and parties in power. There was not a moment, of course, when any of the involved parties thought of transforming this obviously "colonial" service model, to a new "independence" service model, or at least to a "metropolitan" service model like the BBC, even granting that the new government was still looking to emulate Britain in many ways .... The structure was convenient to the new rulers in helping them disseminate messages from the center and to promote loyalty-in the same pattern used by the former colonial master-of the subjects to the new authority"

(Karthigesu, 1987:77-78)

Television was introduced in 1963. The preparation for television had begun in the 1960's by the first Prime Minister of the new Alliance government - Tunku Abdul Rahman. Rahman had a distinct interest in modernising the country by using the Broadcasting Department and in particular, by introducing television. In March 1960, Tunku Abdul Rahman appointed a special committee chaired by Dato' Syed Jaafar Albar, the Deputy Minister of Broadcasting and Information, to develop a television service in Malaysia. The committee produced a report on television structure, known as 'The Blue Paper', which recommended:

a) That the service should be based in Kuala Lumpur, and should be extended to other parts of the country as and when circumstances permitted.

b) That two channels of transmission should be adopted for Kuala Lumpur.

c) That the facilities should provide transmissions in the three languages of the Alliance Party: Malay, Tamil and Chinese.

d) That the new service should be as characteristically Malaysian as practically possible.

e) That commercial advertising in the form of spot announcements should be accepted.

(Karthigesu, 1990: 90; 1994b: 27)

While 'The Blue Paper' covered some broad principles under which television should be operated in Malaysia, the government faced the problem of how to find the right person to run the service. Due to the lack of local expertise in managing television services, the government sought support from within the Commonwealth, because of its historical links with Britain and other Commonwealth countries[7] (Karthigesu, 1990; 1994b). Canada was chosen as the country from which to obtain support because of the Canadian experience in multi-lingual[8] broadcasting, which was seen as particularly suited to Malaysia conditions (Karthigesu1990 and 1994b).

In July 1962, the engineer G. H Jones and a programming expert G. F Brickenden from the Canadian Broadcasting Department were sent to Malaysia to help design a new service and offer technical advice. Jones, who was responsible for evaluating the feasibility of introducing television in Malaysia, left in August 1963 after completing a report known as the 'G. H Jones' report[9]. The report concluded that there was plenty of opportunity for introducing television to Malaysia.

Brickenden was responsible for developing the structure of the television programmes and staff recruitment for the various departments. He also produced a report, which suggested a launch date of 1st September 1963. At a later stage another Canadian consultant, E. C. Mutimer arrived in Malaysia to provide training for television producers (Karthigesu, 1990 and 1994b).

3.1.1 Issues in planning for television

According to 'The Blue Paper' Report, television was meant to transmit programmes in three languages, Malay, Chinese and Tamil. Karthigesu (1994b:40) has observed, however,

that not only did Malaysian television have to provide programmes in these three languages, but also it had to accommodate a fourth language – English. This was due to the fact that because of British Colonial rule, English was the medium of the country's ruling elite and furthermore there were already existing television programmes in English available to fill broadcasting time.

Considering that the ratio of the population at that time was 45:30:20:5 for Malaysian, Chinese, Indian and others, it is significant that 'The Blue Paper' proposed a ratio of 45:30:25 for programming in Malay, Chinese and English language, thereby completely dismissing the Tamil language. This raised the problem of how to include programming that catered for the Tamil speaking audience (Karthigesu, 1994b: 34-41).

After complaints and pressure from the Indian community in 1962 the government agreed to provide an opening for Tamil programmes, and it fell to Brickenden to include Tamil programmes in his plan for programming. He then decided to restructure the programming ratio to 45:30:20:5, for Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil, respectively. This proposal proved operationally difficult and expensive, so Brickenden later suggested a ratio of 39:26:26: and 9 for Malay, English, Chinese, and Tamil. Jones, who had foreseen the language problem, suggested that in order to minimize the problems caused by language divisions the use of electronic subtitling should be introduced. The government approved this idea and later Malay and English language subtitles were established to increase the number of people who could enjoy all the programmes (Karthigesu, 1994b: 34-41).

Further, because of staff constraints and other technical problems, Brickenden proposed a programming schedule of a modest 20¼ hours per week for the first three months of the service. At this stage, it seemed that the television system would be based upon the work of the Canadian experts but the true picture was soon revealed.

According to Karthigesu (1990; 1994b), both of the consultants were only responsible for the day to day operation of the television system at that time. Full control of the policies of the new station remained in the hands of the government. Thus, Karthigesu concluded that the Canadian experts "...assumed, perhaps correctly, that it was not their place to question the wisdom of the proposed system, and merely acted technically and practically in its implementation" (1990:122).

3.2 The second phase (1963-1969):The launch of 'Television Malaysia'

In order to develop the television system, the government appointed three officers to run the organization in February 1963. They were Ong Keng Law (Director), Raja Iskandar (Chief officer at the programmes department) and K.K. Loh (an engineer). Along with these officers, a number of other staff members were also recruited[10].

Until 1963, radio had been the only broadcasting medium in Malaysia but with the introduction of television at the end of the year, the government had to create a separate department for television, which became known as the Department of Television. Radio services were consequently placed under the new Department of Radio established in the same year, and both of these departments were placed under the control of the Ministry of Information previously created in 1961 (Karthigesu, 1994b: 40).

Television was officially introduced on 28 December 1963. It was a single network known as "The First Channel" and was broadcast in black and white. In the same year the country changed name from Malaya to Malaysia, and so the service took the title 'Television Malaysia' (Ministry of Information nd a; Karthigesu, 1994b). Television Malaysia was owned, managed and funded by the government through advertising revenue and a license fee. According to Karthigesu (1994b:107) advertisements were introduced on Television Malaysia in 1965.

Television at that time operated at temporary studios and offices in Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur, with minimum facilities. There were only two studios and the production team consisted of newly trained locals[11]. In spite of difficulties in both programming and staffing, television in Malaysia went on to cover the whole country. When the television service changed, from a pilot to a permanent status in 1964, this was accompanied by an expansion of facilities for transmission, and the construction of a permanent studio centre (Karthigesu, 1994b: 49-57).

Throughout the period of 1964-1969, 'Television Malaysia' grew rapidly. Most of the projects to expand the facilities for television services in Malaysia were funded by the government and Japan. The funds received from Japan were known as the 'Japanese Blood Debt'. In 1967, the Japanese and Malaysia governments settled their 'blood debt' dispute. This dispute referred to the loss suffered by Malaysia under the Japanese occupation, during World War II. In return, Malaysia received compensation in terms of monetary payments worth RM150 million and the import of goods and services from Japan. However, this compensation involved buying goods and services specifically from Japan and was almost entirely used to finance telecommunication and television equipment during that time (Karthigesu, 1990:142).

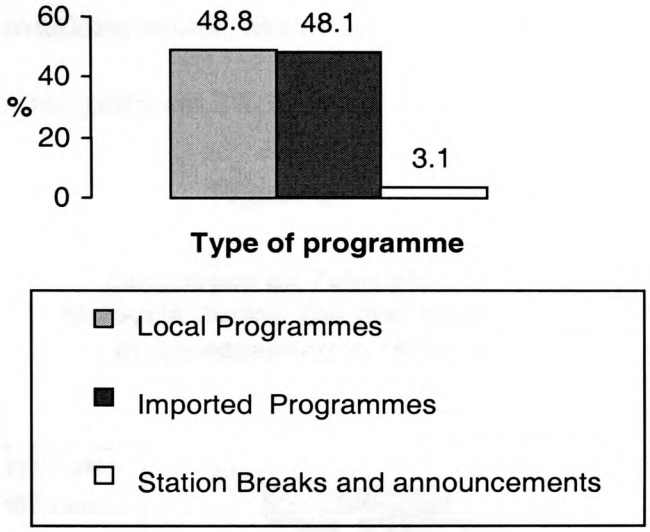
3.2.1 Developments in television content (1963-1969)

After the introduction of television services in Malaysia in 1963, one major problem was how to find enough local programmes (Malay made and produced) to fill the airtime. The inexperience of staff and limited funds amplified this problem. Karthigesu (1990) in his analysis of television programmes between 1963-1983, observed that during the first few weeks of the launch of television in Malaysia in 1963 there were only 24 hours and 45 minutes of programmes broadcast per week (1990: 135-137). Local programmes including news and information managed to contribute 48.8% of the total broadcast hours, 48.1% of

the programmes were imported and the remaining 3.1 % was made up of station breaks and announcements (Karthigesu, 1990: 137).

Figure 1

Broadcasting Schedule During First Week in 1963



Source: Karthigesu (1994b:55)

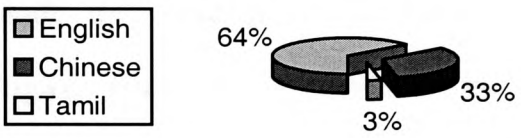
Raja Iskandar, who acted as Head of Programmes at the time, justified the need for the temporary use of imported programmes. He stated,

> "Another major limitation arises from the shortage of local film material for language hours other than English. English speaking material simply abounds in the market. It is also available at quite low prices. On the other hand, vernacular films are few and owing to the small size of the market, are expensive. With limited funds it is well nigh impossible to buy these films for regular screening without the programming vote dwindling away prematurely. Of necessity, English speaking syndicated films will be used to fill the airtime, with subtitles for various language speaking groups. They are useful for providing the time required by local producers to study and be acquainted with the new medium, before they venture on their own to make similar or perhaps better productions with a local tinge."
>
> (Cited in Karthigesu, 1990:135)

Karthigesu, however, noted that imported programmes remained a staple diet of Malaysian television. Most of the imported programmes broadcast during the initial weeks of 'Television Malaysia' in 1963, consisted of entertainment programmes such as *Woody Woodpecker*, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *The Saint* and *The Bugs Bunny Show* (1990:135-137). In terms of language division, 'Television Malaysia' was dominated by the English language with 64.3 % of broadcast hours, Malay and Chinese languages with 32.7% and Tamil in third place with an insignificant 3% (1990: 137).

Figure 2

Languages on Television Malaysia During The first Week of Broadcasting in 1963



Source: Karthigesu (1994b:56)

At this time, the government gave an assurance that television would not become an "instrument for projecting foreign cultures and values". However, as Karthigesu observed, the situation "was not looking very promising" and as television continued to broadcast this assurance became less credible (1990: 138). He also observed that after three years of operation, 'Television Malaysia' gradually managed to increase its total broadcasting hours from 24 hours and 45 minutes weekly to 51 hours and 45 minutes in 1966. However, in 1968, a shortage of studio space and staff resulted in the total broadcast hours per week dropping to 48 hours and 18 minutes in 1969. In terms of programming throughout 1964-1969, local programmes decreased from 48.8% to 37.9% of output. Most locally produced programmes during that time were news programmes, magazine shows and musical programmes. In terms of the language division amongst local programmes, the Malay

language increased to 23.6 %, English language dropped to 6.2%, Chinese dropped to 4.1% and Tamil slightly increased to 4.0% (Karthigesu, 1994b: 61).

Figure 3: Breakdown of Local television Programmes By languages in 1969

Malay	English	Chinese	Tamil
23.6%	6.2 %	4.1%	4.0%

Source Karthigesu (1994b:61)

Alternatively, imported programmes managed to increase from 48.1% in 1964 to 55% in 1969. These programmes were still predominantly entertainment programmes from Hollywood with a small number from Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and India as well as documentaries from Canada and Australia (Karthigesu, 1994b:143-149). Imported programmes, mainly in English, filled 55% of hours, whilst 7.1% of hours were allocated for public service and station announcements.

Figure 4: Ratio of Local to imported programmes in 1969

Local	Imported	Station Break/Announcement
37.9%	55%	7.1%

Source: Karthigesu (1994b:61)

3.2.2 Issues on television content (1963-1969)

Throughout these six years in the development of 'Television Malaysia' many issues arose about language distribution, religion, culture, the quality of local programmes and the effects of imported programmes.

Karthigesu (1990:1994b) observed that the uneven distribution of languages on TV, especially the low level of Tamil programming, raised dissatisfaction among the Indian

community. In addition, given the fact that Malaysia is a multi-racial and multi-religious nation, both aspects were a sensitive issue. After independence in 1957, Islam became the official religion of Malaysia. Thus, it gained a distinguished place in television. Other major religions were inadequately represented (Karthigesu, 1990:160). Similarly, culture became a sensitive issue. Television should not be culturally offensive to any section of the Malaysian population. Any elements, especially in local programmes, which dealt with the sensitive aspects of the religion and cultural of Malay or other ethnic groups, were disallowed (Karthigesu, 1990: 164-165). Thus he noted "This led to the contents of local productions becoming conformist and deferential to tradition" (1990:165).

Locally produced programmes at the time were still at an immature stage and were of poor quality due to the lack of both experienced production staff and financial support. In news and current affairs programmes, the government's views were given priority and there was hardly any coverage of the views of the opposition parties. If there was a speech from an opposition party it was edited to suit the agenda of the government (Karthigesu, 1990:161-164).

As mentioned earlier, 'Television Malaysia' was dominated by English language programming, especially from Hollywood. This provoked concerns, in particular in newspapers, where criticisms were raised and the negative views of the public concerning the role of television in Malaysian society were taken into consideration. Many saw television as having a negative effect on school children because they spent more time watching television than doing their homework. Excessive sex and violence on television, especially in imported programmes, also raised concern amongst the public. Some people felt that programmes containing excessive sex and violence should not be shown on television and if shown, should be censored for children (Karthigesu,1990:158). Given the fact that elements of sex and violence in programmes always led to high ratings, it was impossible to exclude them entirely. Furthermore, these elements "remained intertwined

with the dialogue and action essential to the story line so that editing them out would have made the programmes incomprehensible"(Karthigesu, 1988: 320).

3.3 The third phase (1969-1979): The 1969 Riots

The introduction of 'The Second Channel' took place in late 1969. The launch of this channel was mainly driven by significant events in the political environment in 1969. On May 13th 1969, Malaysia faced its first national crisis since independence. After the general election of 1969[12], the Alliance Party lost their two-third majority, winning only 66 seats out of the 104 seats contested in West Malaysia. In contrast the opposition parties, specifically the Democratic Action Party (DAP), the People's Progressive Party (PPP) and GERAKAN, although they had not won the election, had certainly fared a lot better than in the previous election in 1964 (Ongkili, 1982). The joy of their success led to 'victory processions' that finally turned into an outbreak[13] of ethnic riots between Chinese and the Malays (Ongkili, 1982:201-208). When the situation worsened, the government declared a state of emergency. The government suspended parliament and all media operations were placed under constraints. Newspaper publications were closed for a week and radio and television were operated under strict government control. Only government announcements and statements were allowed (Karthigesu, 1994b: 86).

Tunku Abdul Rahman, appointed a post riots government to regain stability, led by the Deputy Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Razak. Two new policies designed to promote racial harmony were introduced: the National Ideology or Rukun Negara and the New Economic Policy .The National Ideology policy asserted that there were five common values shared by all the different racial groups in Malay. As noted in the previous chapter, these five values were belief in god; loyalty to the king and country; upholding the constitution; supporting the rule of law; and good behaviour and morality. The New Economic Policy was introduced mainly to 'restructure society' in the sense of redistributing opportunities

among races and between occupations and eliminating poverty across all the racial boundaries (Ongkili,1982).

The riots of 1969 brought about changes in the Ministry of Information, which also affected the Department of Television. The government felt that the ministry would be better managed if the television and radio departments were merged. Therefore, in September 1969, both radio and television became one department, known as the Department of Broadcasting, under the leadership of the Director General (Lowe and Kamin, 1982 and Karthigesu, 1994b). This structure remains in place today.

3.3.1 The launch of 'The second Channel'

'The Second Channel' was launched in the same year, on 17 November 1969. The launch of the channel was intended to further unite Malaysian society by catering for ethnic groups other than Malays. However, this did not happen. 'The Second Channel' was supposed to be an addition to 'The First Channel', but later, the government decided to establish two separate channels. 'The First Channel' was renamed RTM 1 (National Channel 1) in 1978 and renamed again as TV 1 in 1990. This channel used the Malay language as its main medium and all imported programmes on that channel had to be subtitled in Malay. 'The Second Channel' was used to broadcast programmes in other languages, including English and the vernacular languages (Karthigesu,1994:94). The division of channels to cater for different groups had many implications for television content, which will be discussed in later chapters. The Second Channel is owned and managed by the government.

On 29 December 1971, television was introduced in Sabah, one of the states in East Malaysia. One of the reasons for this was to promote the national integration of Sabah with Peninsular Malaysia (Karthigesu,1996). In the same year, the Ministry of Information

introduced a series of directives, which regulated the Department of Broadcasting. The directives included the following points about the purposes of broadcasting:

1. To explain in depth and with the widest possible coverage, the policies and programmes of the government in order to ensure maximum understanding by the public;
2. To stimulate public interest and opinion in order to achieve change in line with the requirements of the government;
3. To assist in promoting civic consciousness and foster the development of Malaysian arts and culture; and
4. To provide suitable elements of popular education, general information and entertainment.

(Karthigesu, 1994:100).

In Sarawak, a state next to Sabah in East Malaysia, television was introduced in August 1975 (Karthigesu, 1994b: 132). Colour television was eventually launched in Malaysia on 28 December 1978. 'The National Channel' changed its name on 28 December 1978 and became known as RTM 1, 'The Second Channel' became known as RTM 2 on the same day.

3.3.2 Developments in television content (1969-1979)

The introduction of 'The Second Channel' led to an increase in the total number of broadcast hours on the two channels - from 48 hours in 1969 to 85 hours and 12, minutes between 1969 and 1974. Due to changes in television content stimulated by the 1969 riots, the amount of local programmes increased from 37.9% in 1969 to 42.1% in 1974. This resulted in the emergence of drama and musical programmes, which were presented predominantly in the Malay language and which portrayed Malay culture. Other vernacular languages began to diminish in importance after 1969. Chinese and Tamil

programmes, for example, declined to 3.4% each, while local English programmes constituted only 3.1% of broadcast hours (Karthigesu, 1994b:105).

As Karthigesu (1994b) has also observed, 'The Second Channel' was initially intended to encourage local programmes in languages other than Malay. However, this did not take place. Even though the 1969 riots were followed by an increase in local programming, from 37.9% in 1969 to 42.1% in 1974 the number of programmes in vernacular languages decreased (see figure 5). Imported programmes still dominated television broadcasts in Malaysia, forming 48% of out put in 1974. In addition between 1975-1979, the development of the television industry in Malaysia focused, not on relating to language or cultural differences, but on developing colour television by 1978 (1994b:106-107).

Figure 5:Ratio of Local to imported programmes in 1974

Local	Imported	Station Break/Announcements
42.1%	48 %	9.9 %

Source: Based from Karthigesu (1994b: 105)

Figure 6:Breakdown of Local TV programmes by languages in 1974

Malay	English	Chinese	Tamil
32. 2%	3.1%	3.4%	3.4%

Source: Based on Karthigesu (1994b: 105)

3.3.3 Issues on television content (1969-1979)

Although between 1969 and 1979 there was an effort by the Malaysian government to increase local production, what was produced was of a very poor quality. This was perhaps

due to the government's strategy of using TV to strengthen its authority. Thus the thematic qualities of local programmes at that time evolved around government campaigns and policies, such as the push for integration (Karthigesu,1994b). This period was used by the government to intensify Malay nationalism and culture as well. The government's National Ideology and New Economic Policies were reflected in all local programmes and a deliberate attempt was made to remove Chinese and Tamil elements. In order to facilitate this policy directive further, Chinese and Tamil programmes were relocated to RTM2/TV2. This relocation in turn significantly reversed the previous effort made by RTM1/TV1 to produce local programmes in vernacular languages, though the change in policy had no impact on the import of western programmes (1994b:248). Karthigesu, further noted that the steady escalation of imported programmes was the result of the introduction of colour television, since local teams were unable to produce programmes in colour due to both inadequate facilities and the lack of funds (1994b:155).

3.4 The fourth phase (1980-1994) : Privatisation era

After four decades in which the electronic media were monopolized by the government, the fourth Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamed, introduced a 'Privatisation Policy' to Malaysia in 1984, which ended this tradition (Karthigesu 1987, 1994a; Khor Yoke Lim, 1995). In 1981 the third Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn, retired due to ill health (Karthigesu 1994b) and Dr. Mahathir came into power. He introduced several changes in policy. One of these was the 'Look East Policy'. This was a framework for learning from and adapting to the experiences of a successful eastern nation, namely Japan, which later developed into the 'Privatisation Policy' (Zaharom, 1996:164). In pursuing this policy, Mahathir succeeded in privatizing certain governmental institutions, such as telecommunications, public transport (Majid, 1983), hospitals (Verrasingam, 1983) and television (cited in Rahmah, 1997).

In 1982, Dr. Mahathir brought forward the election date by a year in order to test out his 'Privatisation Policy'. When the results[14] were revealed the Alliance Party, had won once again. The Alliance Party was still the governing party during the period covered by this research .

3.4.1 The launch of TV3

The intention to privatise television institutions arose in the 1970's but only became a reality when, in 1983, the cabinet approved plans for the introduction of private television (Karthigesu, 1994; Rahmah, 1995). Karthigesu (1987; 1994a), however, has asserted that the decision of the government to allow the operation of private television alongside the state network (RTM1 and 2) cannot be interpreted as an attempt to liberalize broadcasting institutions in Malaysia. The main reasons were economic (Karthigesu, 1987; 1994b; Rahmah 1995; 1997). In 1983, it was reported that the national deficit amounted to RM50 billion and the World Bank warned that there would be an economic crisis if Malaysia did not improve the economic situation (Bala 1988, cited in Rahmah 1997: 53). The Finance Minister at that time, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, announced that the 'Privatisation Policy' was aimed at reducing the pace of public sector expansion in the economy. This supposedly would help to further reduce the need for taxes and borrowing and provide economic growth (Karthigesu, 1987: 1994a; Rahmah 1995; 1997).

The second reason for the introduction of the policy was to challenge the proliferation of video recorders and tape rentals in the early 1980's (Karthigesu, 1987; Rahmah 1995; 1997). When the government decided to implement the 'Look East Policy' in 1981, sales of video recorders had increased from 2,800 units in 1979 to almost 1 million units in 1984 (Rahmah 1995: 54), with 75% of those using video recorders and video tapes coming from the Chinese community (Rahmah,1997:6). The reason why audiences watched more rented tapes in the early 1980's was because government television, RTM1 and 2, was unable to meet audience demand for satisfactory programmes. In this respect, Karthigesu

(1994a) noted that: "From a different perspective it can be described as a way of capitalizing on the hunger of the audience for varied entertainment which the official medium under constraint by government policies was not able to do" (1987:78).

In addition to these two factors, the deluge of television programmes mainly from the states that bordered other countries (namely Johore Baharu, which shares a border with Singapore) had resulted in the diffusion of watching activities of Malaysian audiences. Beins (1983), revealed that 60% of participants in his study in Johore watched programmes from 'Singapore Broadcasting Corporation' (SBC) while only 23% of Singaporeans watch programmes aired by RTM. In other surveys conducted by 'Survey Research Malaysia' (SRM) in 1985, 11% of the adult audience in Peninsular Malaysia, preferred to watch programmes on SBC (cited in Rahmah,1995: 7). This activity inhibited the Malaysian government's desire to spread government ideas to the people (Rahmah,1997:55). Anxious that the audience might be turning to alternative sources such as video and SBC (a station immune from governmental control), the government introduced private television (Karthigesu 1987,1994a; Rahmah, 1995; 1997).

The franchise to operate the first private television station was awarded to 'The Fleet Group" in August 1983. Fleet then entered into a joint venture with other organisations to incorporate 'Sistem Televisyan Malaysia Berhad' (STMB) (Malaysian System Ltd.), better known as TV3. Fleet, the biggest shareholder, held a 40% shareholding (Wang and Mustafa, 1996: 267). Karthigesu (1994a: 83), however, revealed that The Fleet Group also owned the country's leading newspaper groups[15]. Other shareholders in TV3 included The Utusan Melayu Press (20%), The Syed Kecik Foundation (20%), Maika Holdings (10%) controlled by the Malaysian Indian Congress, a partner in the ruling alliance, and Daim Zainudin (10%) (Gomez,1994:80). In addition, Zaharom (1996) noted that individuals that had a relationship with politicians and the ruling elite were the ones allowed to operate the media in the new television system (1996:167). Although there have been some shifts in

terms of the shareholders of TV3, Karthigesu (1994a) and Zaharom (1996) both observed that the ownership remains firmly in the hands of the ruling elite.

TV3 was finally launched on 1st June 1984. Although it was a private television station, the channel still had to comply with government regulations (Rahmah,1997). The Chairman, Mohamed Taufik Tun Dr. Ismail (son of the Deputy Prime Minister), declared that the company would comply with the conditions imposed by the government, namely to operate on the principles of the National Ideology (Karthigesu, 1987:79).

3.4.2 Implications of the introduction of TV3

The Privatisation Policy impacted on the industry, in ways ranging from trends in television programmes, scheduling, audiences, and the overall performance of television in Malaysia (Karthigesu, 1987, 1994a; Rahmah, 1995,1997; Asiah, 1995).

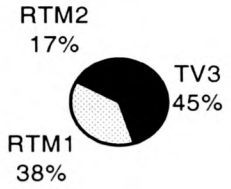
The privatisation of television resulted in the launch of TV3 in June 1984. When TV3 started its operation, the channel pursued the commercial objective of making a profit: "It was more a corporate business than an agent for social change or development. It had to make money first and talk about social commitments later" (Karthigesu, 1987: 80). Thus, it is not surprising to find that when TV3 entered the entertainment scene in Malaysia, its first action was to buy newer and more expensive imported programmes. This was done simply to make a profit, to gain popularity and to safeguard its position (Karthigesu, 1987 and 1994a). The two government channels (RTM1 and RTM2) at that point decided to remain calm. TV3, when first started, did not seem to threaten the existing channels, whose objectives were mainly to serve and educate their audiences and to promote government policies. Furthermore the revenues of RTM 1 and RTM 2 were assured. This was because they came from the national treasury, which in turn collected income through advertising and a license fee (Rahmah, 1995: 54).

TV3 started its services in urban metropolitan areas, beginning in the capital Kuala Lumpur and then rapidly spreading throughout the country. It carried programmes designed to satisfy the demand in urban areas, where the audience was somewhat displeased with RTM1 and RTM2. This urban audience was very frustrated with the conservative values of these channels and their tendency to avoid purchasing new, bold programmes from the West (Karthigesu, 1987).

In the pursuit of profit, TV 3 showed imported programmes, predominantly from Hollywood and introduced the 'Chinese Belt', a series of Chinese dramas imported from Hong Kong and Taiwan, at 7.00 p.m. every day (Karthigesu,1987;1994a). The introduction of the 'Chinese Belt' was one of the ways the station attracted a Chinese audience that had drifted to watching video (Rahmah,1997). In addition, TV3 also introduced 'brighter' local programmes, such as news and current affairs, magazine, sports and entertainment programmes into its schedules (Khor, 1995; Noor Bathi, 1996). Within ten months of operations, TV3 managed to earn RM51.9 million, about $19.22 million US (Karthigesu, 1994:85). Within a couple of years TV 3 managed to gain popularity among Malaysian audiences. In a report on the *Mass Media in Peninsular Malaysia* in 1986 the Ministry of Information revealed that in the initial months of its operation, TV3 managed to attract 855,000 (45%) of the adult audience in the Selangor and Wilayah Persekutuan (central Region).

Figure 7

Viewing Figures (1985)



Source: Ministry of Information (1986)

In terms of the ethnic breakdown, TV3 attracted 39% of Malay viewers while both RTM channels combined managed to attract 77% Malay and 23% Chinese viewers. Three years after the introduction of the new channel, both existing channels RTM1 and RTM2 started to feel the impact. RTM's reaction to losing their popularity was to switch from the usual norms of bureaucracy (concerned with upholding the National Ideology programmes) to a more open policy (Karthigesu, 1994a:85).

Both RTM1 and RTM2 then started to reschedule their programmes to compete with TV3. In January 1987 they introduced a new schedule, with a similar 'Chinese Belt' on RTM2 scheduled against TV3 (Rahmah,1997). In addition an Indian Belt (imported Tamil and Hindi movies) was also created to attract more audiences (Karthigesu,1987:81). RTM also bought more expensive imported shows, such as *Peter the Great* and *Doubletake*. A late evening movie slot was also created (Karthigesu,1994a:86). The effort made by RTM proved a success. In January 1987, viewer figures showed that RTM had managed to attract 5.34 million viewers, while RTM2 showed a tremendous enlargement from 1.7 million in 1986 to 2.45 million in 1987 - the highest figure ever reached by the channel (Karthigesu, 1987:82).

However, TV3 did not 'sit quietly' but decided instead to strike back. By April 1987, more Chinese programmes were introduced and transmitted a half an hour earlier (6.30 pm) than RTM2's Chinese programmes. In May 1987, TV3 managed to attract 1.2 million (94%) of viewers between 6.30-7.00 p.m. and 90% between 7.00-8.00 p.m. (Rahmah, 1997:14). In this sense, Karthigesu (1994a:87) concluded that the war between RTM and TV3 would continue as long as this form of competition was 'encouraged' by governments. He further pointed out that the fact that,

> "...the government, which was in a position to control this situation did not do so, suggests that either there was a new mood of liberalism, within the government as far as national affairs and ideologies were concerned, or the

need to make profit for both the infant and the parent companies-and therefore safeguard and promote the substantial investment from government or ruling political parties that had gone into venture-had prevailed over ideological considerations".

(Karthigesu, 1994a: 85)

Noor Bathi (1996) noted that in 1984, TV3 imported almost 80% of its programmes from the West, mainly from the USA and over 12 % from other parts of Asia, mostly Hong Kong and Taiwan, and they were mainly being broadcast during prime time slots (between 8.00-10.00 pm). In 1985, TV3 had increased local programmes to 24% of the total weekly airtime and gradually, by 1989, local programmes increased to 31%; overall imported programmes were reduced to 69% (Noor Bathi, 1996:150-152).

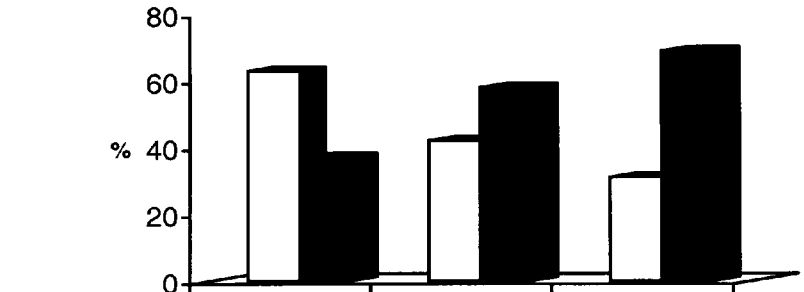
RTM, on the other hand, went in the opposite direction. Due to the obsession with winning back their popularity, they 'unconsciously' put an emphasis on imported programmes. This upset the ratio of the local and imported programmes set at 60:40 (%), by the Ministry of Information Malaysia in the early 1980's (Asiah, 1991: 171). Significantly, RTM subjected itself to the dictates of the Western television market more than ever before (Karthigesu, 1994a: 87). Karthigesu also pointed out that the introduction of TV3 marked the 'relaxation' of RTM's moral standards and that censorship of sex and violence in imported programmes became less strict in order to spice up entertainment. There was also a new twist to these problems. In the past, before the creation of TV3, excessive sex and violent programmes came predominantly from Hollywood, but now these elements came from other sources – especially Chinese programmes produced in Hong Kong and Taiwan and to some extent from Indonesian and Indian films (Karthigesu, 1987:83).

Karthigesu (1994a) also observed that the competition between RTM and TV3 had provided Chinese and Indian audiences with an increase in programmes in their languages. However, there was little promotion of local Chinese and Indian programmes due to the fact they were expensive to produce and did not attract sponsors. Imported programmes were used as a solution to this problem (Karthigesu, 1994a: 87-88).

Asiah (1995:132-133) revealed another interesting point about the ratio of the local to imported programmes in the early 1990's. Her content analysis of three weeks television in January, June and December 1992, suggested that there was an 'unbalanced diet' in terms of local and imported programmes on RTM and TV3. The ratios of local to imported programmes on three channels were: RTM1 63:37, RTM2 42:58 and TV3 31:69). The increase in local programmes on RTM1, further enhanced the effort to make RTM1 the prime Malay channel (Rahmah, 1997: 22).

Figure 8

Ratio of Local to Imported programmes (1992)



	RTM1	RTM2	TV3
□ Local	63	42	31
■ Imported	37	58	69

Station

Source: Asiah Sarji (1995: 132 – 133)

When broken down into genres, most of the imported programmes in the three channels were made up from features films, followed by TV series, then animated cartoons and lastly by TV drama. Sitcom, entertainment, sport, children's programmes, documentaries, news, religion and women's hour made up the remainder of the scheduling, see figure 9.

Figure 9

Programme types	RTM1	RTM2	TV3
Feature Films	15.9%	30.2%	32.6%
TV Series	9.2%	16%	17.8%
Animated Cartoons	20.6%	0.8%	15.3%
TV Drama	12.1%	13.3%	10.5%

Source: Asiah Sarji (1995:132-135)

Additionally, in terms of language breakdown, English language programmes still dominated with 75.6%, of the total programmes out put. Followed by Chinese (10.7%), Hindi and Tamil (7%) and the remainder made up of other language programmes.

3.5 The Fifth Phase (1995-1998) : Contemporary scenario

This sections reviews recent developments in the television industry in Malaysia. Firstly, it looks at the introduction of the second commercial channel. It then covers the development of cable and satellite television as well as the most recent development in terrestrial television-namely the introduction of Ntv 7.

3.5.1 MetroVision

The Privatisation Policy introduced in 1984 led to the establishment of another private television station, in addition to TV 3, approved by the Malaysian government. The second private Television station, known as MetroVision[16], was officially launched on 1st July 1995. MetroVision began in the Klang Valley area, the central region of Kuala Lumpur, which made up about 50% of the country's consumer purchasing power (*New Sunday Times*, 12 July 1998). In 1998, MetroVision received approval from the Ministry of Information to extend its service nationwide over the next year. However, its revenue

from advertisements had dropped, due to an economic downturn. The station decided to concentrate the broadcast service in Klang Valley area (*New Straits Times*, 4 June 1998).

MetroVision was owned by a consortium of four companies: Melewar Corporation Bhd (with a 50% stake), Utusan Melayu (30%), Medan Mas (10%) and Diversified System Sdn.Bhd.(10%) (Wang and Mustafa,1996). As with TV3, the two biggest shareholders in Metrovision were closely related to the ruling party. Zaharom (1996: 169) reveals that the Melewar Corporation was controlled by Tunku Abdullah of the Negeri Sembilan royal house – a close associate of the Prime Minister (Mahathir Mohamed). The Utusan Melayu, which owned 30% of the company, was controlled by UMNO, the dominant faction in the ruling party.

MetroVision entered the environment of broadcasting with the objective of being different from RTM1 and 2 and TV3. The station promised to give a new meaning to the word "entertainment" and attempted to broadcast programmes aimed at the tastes of various age groups, packed with action, excitement and drama (*New Sunday Times*, 2 July 1995). MetroVision delivered these exciting programmes. They form a year joint venture with Star TV, Hong Kong which provided musical entertainment from Asia (*Business Times*, 2 September 1995).

In an effort to be individually recognised, MetroVision also introduced a 'Hindi Belt', which screened the latest Hindi Movies from India every Sunday evening. This was a conscious effort to compete with the RTM2/TV2 and TV3 Hindi-Tamil film slot on Saturday afternoon and the TV3 Hindi-Tamil slot, which screened old movies (*New Straits Times*, 2 October 1996).

In addition, MetroVision also broadcast numerous imported programmes from Hollywood, such as *Frasier, Star Trek: The Next Generation, Cybil, EyeWitness, Tales of the Crypt, The Bold and the Beautiful* etc. (*New Straits Times*, 23 October 1996, 28 July 1997,11

August 1997). They also imported television 'sitcoms' from Singapore like *Under One Roof* (*New Straits Times*, 2 February 1996). MetroVision deployed the same strategy as TV3, that is, using imported products to gain a large percentage of the mass audience and higher advertising revenue. 40 % of its output was local and the remaining 60% was imported (*Malay Mail*, 16 June 1995).

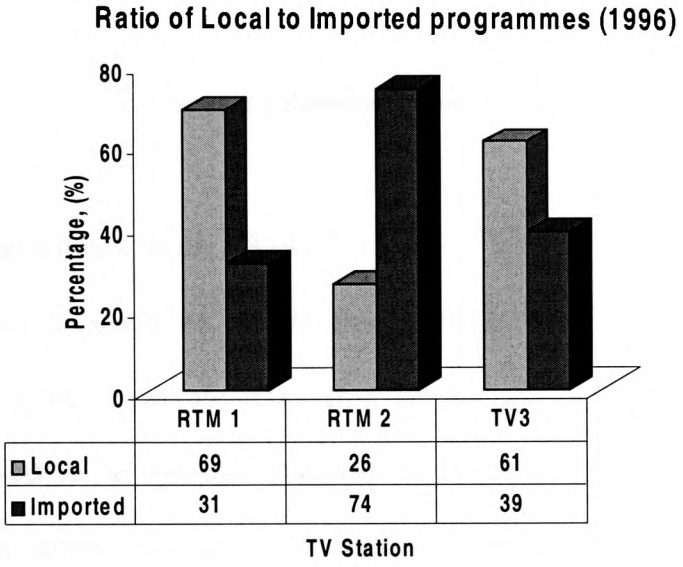
With the coming of MetroVision, RTM2/TV2 and TV3 were encouraged to compete. RTM2 responded to the challenge by airing the hottest, highly rated programmes in Hollywood - *ER*, *The X-Files* and *Murphy Brown* - while TV3 cornered the ratings with American sitcoms such as *Mad About You* and *Home Improvement* (Viewer, 1995). Malaysian television history showed that, since the introduction of TV3, there had been a constant war between a RTM2/TV2 and TV3 to buy the latest imported programmes. The introduction of MetroVision further intensified commercial rivalries in the industry.

However, MetroVision demonstrated its difference by giving priority to English language programmes. In his launch speech in 1995, Chairman Tunku Abdullah Tunku Abdul Rahman proposed to use the English language as the main medium on MetroVision (*Berita Harian*, 20 September 1995). Despite strong criticism from local academics and artists (especially those who supported the use of the Malay language), the station decided to continue using English language programmes. It was not surprising, therefore when local news papers revealed in 1995 that MetroVision was the television station using the highest percentage of English language programmes, 66.04% of its total weekly output (*Berita Harian*, 28 September 1995). This emphasis discouraged the promotion of the national language (Malay language) on television and went against the government's wishes in this area.

In spite of the increase in foreign programmes, Zaharom's (1996) study of a week of television content revealed some other interesting figures. RTM1/TV1 increased its ratio of local programmes to imported to 69:31, RTM2/TV2 reduced its ratio of local to

imported programmes to 26:74 and TV3 drastically increased the ratio of local to imported programmes to 61:39. This phenomenon was in line with the government's stated wish, announced in early the 1990's, that by the year 2000, television in Malaysia would reach the ratio of 80:20 local to imported programmes (Ramlah Jalee, 1998).

Figure 10

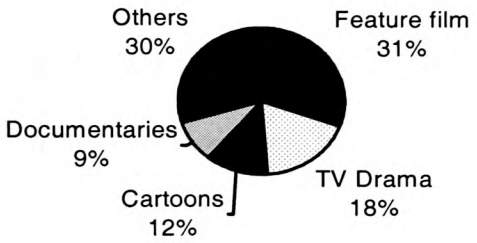


Source: Zaharom, Nain (1996:168-170)

Echoing Asiah's findings in 1992, Zaharom also found that when broken down into specific genres, the majority (80.4%) of imported programmes on the three channels (TV1, 2 and 3) were made up of just four genres: feature films (30.6%), television dramas (18.4%), animated cartoons (12%) and documentaries (9.4%). Large portions of these genres were broadcast during prime viewing time, normally between 8.30pm and 11.00pm (1996:170).

Figure 11

Breakdown of imported programmes (1992)



Source : Zaharom Nain (1996:168-170)

As for local programmes, both RTM1/TV1 and TV3 exhibited a positive development in the area of local productions. The Privatisation Policy opened up the way for the development of a local, private television programme making industry. Local television productions ceased to be the sole preserve of the television channel operators. The new private ventures concentrated on musical programmes, dramas, TV magazine and documentaries (Rahmah, 1995:16; Wang and Mustafa, 1996:268).

By 1996 news/current affairs accounted for 41.6% of all locally produced transmissions, due mainly to the fact that the news was broadcast successively in different languages. Local features took second place at 9.6% and TV drama took third place with 7% of play-time (Zaharom, 1996:173). Wang and Mustafa (1996:268-269) noted that, stimulated by the government's policy of encouraging local, particularly Malay programmes in the 1990's, many of the locally produced dramas were broadcast daily on RTM1/TV1 and TV3. Also RTM1/TV1 and TV3 started to buy and show entertainment locally produced by private Chinese and Tamil filmmakers.

In the early 1990's, Zaharom (1996) has suggested that Malaysian television witnessed the 'mushrooming' of locally produced programmes designed to promote Malaysian culture and to enhance nation building. He also revealed, however, that most of these locally

produced programmes (drama, situation comedies, musical programmes, sports programmes and even current affair magazines such as *Majalah 3*), were imitations of western genre (1996: 173). Thus he argued:

> "...that as far as the links between the international market and television in Malaysia are , what may have initially been a convenient and, perhaps, necessary compromise is fast becoming an unholy alliance between transnational media companies and the local ruling elite. It would appear that in their seemingly relentless drive to get as much revenue as if feasible from television, the Malaysian policy makers, consciously or otherwise, have aligned themselves with the transnational actors, leading Malaysian television even further into the international marketplace and its attendant pressures. At the same time, it would appear that any earlier notions, presumably sincere, about creating a national identity have been push further down the list of priorities".
>
> (Zaharom, 1996:173)

In a similarly critical vein, Wang and Mustafa (1996:276) have argued that locally produced programming posed a threat to the creation of a Malaysian national identity, because these programmes represented the interests of majority groups in Malaysian society namely the Malays and Chinese and marginalised other minority groups.

Whilst efforts have been made to promote national unity and to further develop the formulation of national identity, namely with programmes which portray inter-ethnic relationships, these programmes, Wang and Mustaffa (1996) argue, have made heavy use of stereotypes. In addition, Noor Bathi (1996:156) suggests that, Malay men are often portrayed as being obsessed with the idea of having a second wife, while Malay women are represented as intruding gossips. The Chinese, alternatively, have been portrayed as

successful business people and the Indians as poor, unskilled, characters. It can be argued that the use of highly stereotyped television characters on Malaysian television does not encourage the promotion of a unified national identity.

3.5.2 Cable television

Not long after the establishment of MetroVision, the first subscription based television network was launched in late 1995. As with Metrovision, the transmissions were originally intended for the Klang Valley area but were slowly expanded to cover the southern part of Peninsular Malaysia, Negeri Sembilan and Melaka (Mega TV,nd). After three and a half years of operation, MegaTV reached virtually all of the states in Peninsular Malaysia (Zaharom and Mustafa, cited in Zaharom, 2000:143).

The first cable television service, known as Mega TV, was run by the consortium Cable View Services Sdn. Bhd. The largest shareholder in this consortium, Sistem Televisyen Malaysia Berhad (a 40% stake) also owned TV3 (Zaharom, 1996:167). The others included The Ministry of Finance Inc. (30%), Ibex TV Sdn. Bhd. (12.5%), Eurocast Sdn. Bhd. (12.5%) and Sri Utara Sdn. Bhd (5%) (Wang,1998:44). Two main requirements were made clear by Datuk Mohamed Rahmat, the Minister of Information, with regard to the introduction of subscription-based television. Firstly, the new service would be required to expose Malaysia to the most up to date contemporary information, including reports on American, European and Malaysian news, and on foreign entertainment stories, which could be used to improve Malaysian culture; secondly, the service should be aimed at the tourist market - top hotels and business clientele in the capital city, Kuala Lumpur (cited in Zaharom, 1996:176).

The installation cost of MegaTV was approximately RM 99.00 with a monthly subscription of RM 90.00. This provided 24 hour broadcasting on 9 channels such as CNN, the Discovery Channel (for documentaries), ESPN for sport, the Cartoon Network,

with Turner Classic Movies (TCM), AXN for action dramas, CTN for Chinese Entertainment and News, Thanghathirai for Indian cultures, Arirang the Korean Channel and also CNNFN which provided the latest financial and business news. As this list illustrates, there is no doubt that most of the programmes aired by MegaTV were imported, especially from the United States (Mega TV, nd).

The advent of new technology in the television industry had some negative implications however. Zaharom (1996) argues that the development of cable television retarded the growth of local television, turning these productions into poor cousin versions of the other broadcasts. There was little chance of improvement, due to the lack of facilities and incentives provided by a government that failed to see the need for a progressive production policy (1996:176).

Zaharom also suggests that this kind of development widened the already large gap that existed between the information rich and information poor, where those who could pay increasingly had greater access to the broadcast medium. Finally, he pointed out that the development in cable television was likely to further marginalise alternative forms of television content and forms of expression, which were not deemed commercially viable. Thus the effect of cable would invariably be to put pressure on local programme makers to conform to the dictates and logic of the market, leading to cultural conformity rather than cultural diversity (1996:176).

3.5.3 Satellite television

In previous years, the Malaysian government had banned the use of parabolic satellite dishes, mainly to keep Malaysian airwaves clear of sex and violence but with the added advantage of avoiding the broadcast of 'unflattering' news items (*Utusan Express,* 1996). The idea of launching a Malaysian owned satellite had been suggested in the late 1980's, but was initially rejected by the government as being too costly to achieve (*Utusan*

*Express,*1996). The launching of Malaysia's first satellite system in 1996 ushered in a new era of Malaysian broadcasting. The Malaysian East Asia Satellite System (MEASAT) 1 was launched on the 13th January 1996 and the sister channel MEASAT 2 was launched 11 months later on the 14th November 1996.[17] The Minister of Information, Datuk Mohamed Rahmat, explained the decision by stating: "Inevitably, we will open our sky, but just a little, with the use of a specific satellite dish approved by ministry" (*Utusan Express*, 1996). The use of a 60cm parabolic dish, the first if its kind in Asia, was approved, with the specified device receiving signals solely from the MEASAT satellite (*Utusan Express*, 1996).

The go ahead for the launching of a Malaysian satellite was made in conjunction with the Multimedia Super Corridor Project (MSC)[18], inspired by the Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamed, in 1996. The project's primary objective was to propel Malaysia to the status of a fully developed country by 2020. Implementation of the project meant that the government had to lift the ban on the used of parabolic satellite in order to achieve its goal (Wang, 1998:74). The launching of the Malaysian Satellite also reduced the deficit of millions spent on the leases of foreign satellites[19] (*Utusan Malaysia*, 13 September 1996).

History once again repeated itself and three decades after the establishment of the Malaysian television industry, the country had to seek foreign technical expertise to run the new services. This time assistance came mainly from the USA, Australia and Iran. This is somewhat reminiscent of the decision, made 39 years previously, when Malaysia was planning the launch of the first television service in 1963. The US Hughes Space Communication Company was made responsible for the launching of the Malaysian satellite. A locally trained technical person was selected to run the Control Centre in Langkawi, Kedah in March 1996. The two experts from Australia and Iran, who had supplied the expertise and the training, left the country in February 1997 (*Utusan Malaysia*, 13 January 1996 and 24 December 1996).

MEASAT[20] was authorised to provide services under the brand name ASTRO (All Asia Television and Radio Company). The service was subscription based and available nationwide offering twenty-four television and eight radio channels, all in digital format.

The television channels included five local channels, two government channels[21], seventeen all imported channels from Asian countries and America[22] and one ASTRO Preview channel (ASTRO, 1997).

To make sure that all the imported programmes were 'suitable' to be seen by Malaysians, all foreign programmes transmitted were delayed for one hour from the actual broadcast time in order to be vetted by the Malaysian Government. Some parties refused to comply with the regulations however. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News Service, for example chose not to accept government control, because they insisted that their programmes should be aired without censorship (Wang, 1998: 74).

MEASAT was owned by a telecommunication company comprising Binariang Sdn Bhd (with an 85% stake) and Khazanah Nasional Berhad, an investment holding company of the Ministry Of Information (15%) (*Utusan Express*, 1996). The implications of the introduction of satellite television in Malaysia are yet to be investigated, but already emerging from the current scenario is that the 'open sky policy' adopted in Malaysia somehow stimulates the proliferation of foreign products in the television industry. With seventeen imported channels, this has certainly encouraged the growth of imported programmes in the television industry.

Despite an installation fee of RM 1,500 and a monthly subscription of RM 80.00, it is surprising to see that within less than six months of operations ASTRO received more than 50,000 subscriptions. By the end of 1997, within a year of broadcasting, ASTRO surpassed 100,000 subscribers, a phenomenon described by Marketing Director Shazali Ramly as unparalleled by any other satellite broadcasting company in the world (*New*

Straits Times, 11 April 1997). As Karthigesu (1994a) asserts, it could be argued that this is due to an audience that was carefully prepared for Hollywood programming.

3.5.4 Ntv7

The latest development in Malaysian broadcasting was the introduction of the seventh terrestrial channel, National Television 7 (Ntv7), which officially commenced broadcasts to 80% of the area of the country on the 7th of April 1998 (Ntv7,1998). This Channel was owned by a business tycoon from Sarawak - Datuk Effendi Norwawi - also a former Managing Director of The Sarawak State Economic Development Corporation (Zaharom and Mustafa, 2000:169). Ntv7 had a mission to create 'a happier' and 'more enlightened' Malaysia using lofty ideals to promote national building and to further integrate Peninsular and the East Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. The methods for these ideals were unclear however, since only 20% of broadcasting time on the first day of transmission was devoted to local programmes, the majority (80%) consisting of imported programmes[23] (Hartati,1998). It would seem that the word 'integration' is probably more adapted to integrating the ownership of the mass media in Malaysia, as the owner of the latest television station has a strong link with the government.

Malaysia has moved forward then, in terms of broadcasting technology with the introduction of cable and satellite television. However, when it comes to finding the right material to be broadcast on television, it is still heavily dependent on foreign products. Chairman Datuk Effendi Norwawi explained that the decision to air imported programmes on NTV7 was to attract more audience (*Business Times*, 13 March 1998). This is reminiscent of Raja Iskandar (Head of Programmes of RTM1 in 1963) who stated that the imported programmes being served on the RTM1 would only act as a 'time filler'. However, it is evident that this 'time filler' managed to claim a permanent position in Malaysian broadcasting.

3.6 Ownership of the media

The media in general, and in particular television in Malaysia are largely owned and controlled by the government. This is explored in-depth in this section.

As indicated in previous chapters, television was introduced into Malaysia by the government after independence was achieved in 1957. The first channel, RTM1, introduced in 1963, was renamed as TV1 in 1990 and the second channel, RTM2, launched in 1969 was also renamed TV2 in 1990. Both of these channels are fully owned and managed by the Malaysian government through the Department of Broadcasting, which is one of three departments under the Ministry of Information[24] (Karthigesu, 1990, 1994b; Zaharom, 1996; Ministry of Information, nd a).

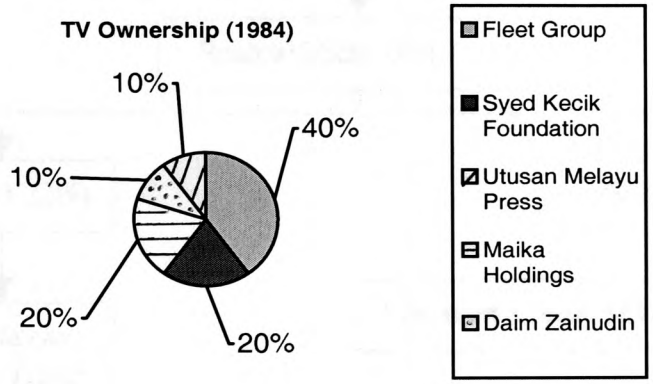
After almost twenty years of virtual state control and monopoly, Mahathir Mohamed, the fourth Prime Minister, changed the attitude of the government towards television. The 'Look East Policy' was introduced which gave birth to the Privatisation Policies, which as described brought about the introduction of private television companies. In 1984, the first private television station TV3 was introduced, marking a turning point in the history of broadcasting since it was the first time private ownership was allowed in television. However, as suggested earlier (Karthigesu, 1987,1994a; Zaharom, 1996, Wang and Mustafa, 1996), the 'new attitude' towards the ownership of television was not strictly liberal. What emerged was a selective privatisation exercise, linking the new media owners with ruling political parties (Zaharom, 1996, 2000).

When the decision was announced, the franchise to operate the first private television was awarded to a joint venture of five companies that had close connections to the ruling political parties. These included: the Fleet Group (40%), the Syed Kecik Foundation (20%), Utusan Melayu Press (20%), the MIC (Malayan Indian Congress) investment arm - Maika Holdings (10%) and Daim Zainudin (10%) (Gomez, 1994:80; see also figure 12).

In terms of the initial organization of the station, it was also aligned to suit the politicians in power. Thus, it is not surprising to see that the Chairman of TV3 Mohamed Tawfik Tun Dr. Ismail, was the son of a former deputy Prime Minister, which in turn implied the company's willingness to comply with the conditions of the license imposed by the government (Karthigesu, 1987: 79).

Figure 12

Initial Ownership of STMB (TV3)



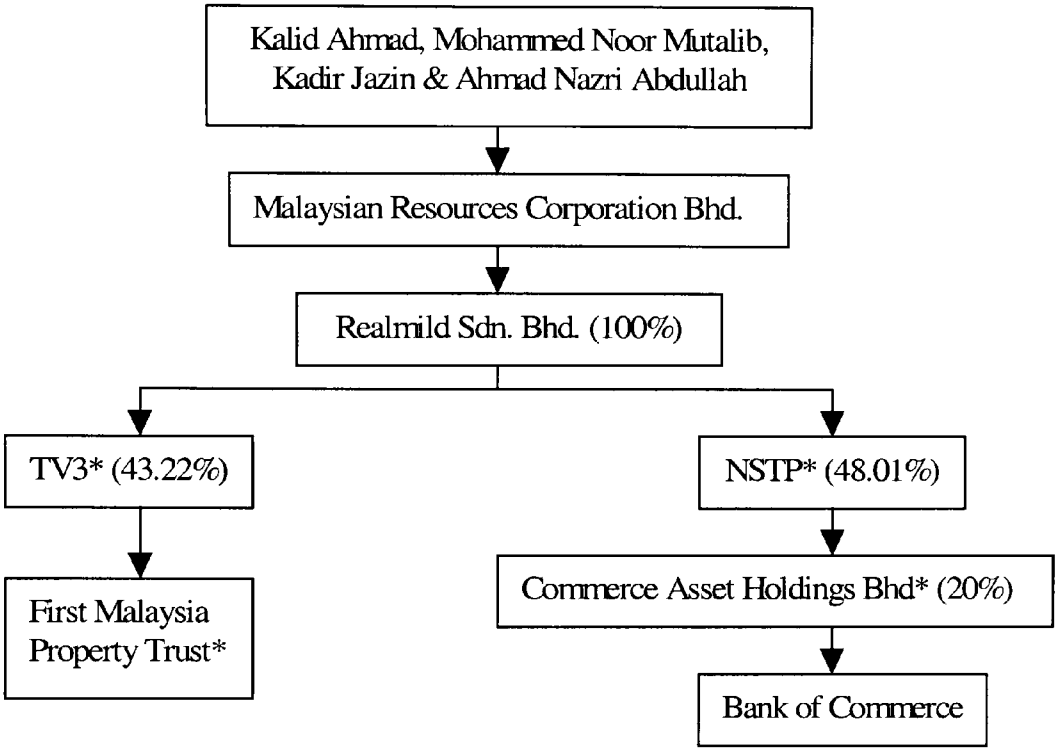
Source: Gomez (1994:80)

Seven years later in February 1991, Renong Bhd. the major shareholder of New Straits Times Press (NSTP) acquired NSTP's stake of TV 3 (Gomez, 1994:82). Then, in 1993, through the biggest management take-over in Malaysian corporate media, a major stake of the local media, the leading newspaper (NSTP) and TV 3, came under the ownership of Realmild Sdn. Bhd. Realmild then turned over its rights and obligations to Malaysian Resources Corporation Bhd. (MRCB) a public listed company. MRCB acquisition included 48.01% of the stake in NSTP and a 43.22% stake in TV3 (Gomez, 1994:134-135).

What was more significant is that the MRCB was under the control of four Senior Management executives of New Straits Times Press[25] (the leading Newspaper company), closely associated with Anwar Ibrahim, the then Deputy Prime Minister (Gomez, 1994:134-138 and Zaharom, 1996:167)[26]. See Figure 13.

Figure 13

MRCB's corporate structure after the management buy-out of the New Straits Times Press and TV3.



*Publicly-listed company

Source: Gomez (1994:136)

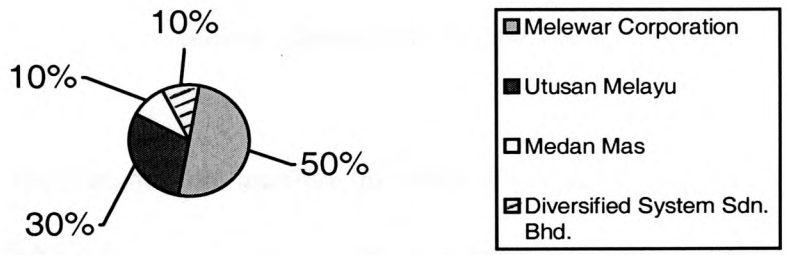
Gomez (1993) has pointed out that the reshuffle in the corporate sector during this time was politically inspired by Anwar, who gained control of the media (particularly print media) and used it to accumulate support for the upcoming UMNO vice-presidential election (cited in Wang,1998:68). She also observed that the local press produced wide and positive coverage of Anwar until he was dismissed from the office in 1998 (Wang,1998:68).

On 1st July 1995, the second private television station, MetroVision, was launched. Ownership of the channel again demonstrated the concentration of media ownership in Malaysia. MetroVision was owned by a consortium of four companies: Melewar Corporation Bhd (with a 50% stake), Utusan Melayu (30%), Medan Mas (10%) and

Diversified System Sdn.Bhd. (10%) (*New Straits Times*, 24 June 1994). The two major shareholders in MetroVision were once again closely related to the ruling party. The Melewar Corporation, controlled by Tunku Abdullah of the Negeri Sembilan royal house, was associated with the Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamed. The Utusan Melayu was owned by UMNO, the dominant party in the government (Zaharom, 1996:167).

Figure 14

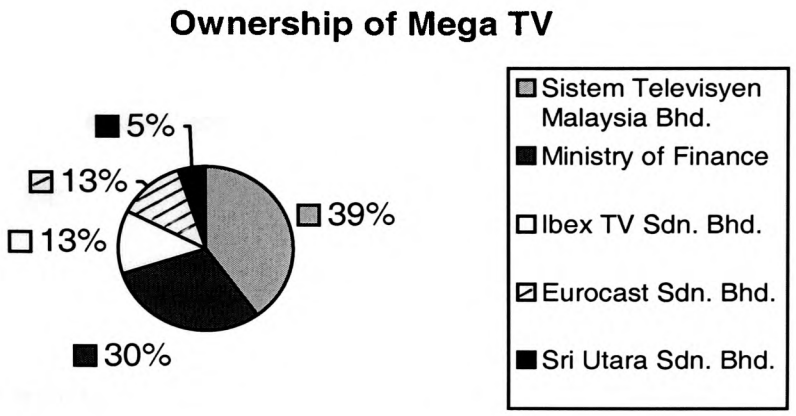
Ownership of Metrovision



Source: ***New Straits Times*, 24 June 1994**

Zaharom (2000) has observed that despite the increase in channels and broadcast hours, the concentration of ownership has remained firmly in the hands of the dominant political powers, particularly UMNO. He also points to a further concentration in ownership. Towards the end of 1995, the first pay-per-view television station Mega TV was launched. Mega TV was managed by the Cable View Services Sdn, Bhd consortium. The largest shareholder in the consortium, with a 40 percent stake, was Sistem Televisyen Malaysia Berhad, who also owned TV3. The Ministry of Finance Inc. held 30%, Ibex TV Sdn. Bhd. 12.5%, Eurocast Sdn. Bhd. 12.5% and Sri Utara Sdn. Bhd 5% (*The Star*, 26 May 1995).

Figure 15



Source: Zaharom Nain (1996:167)

The launch of the first Malaysian satellite in 1996 witnessed a repeat of the same patterns of ownership. MEASAT was owned by the telecommunication company Binariang Sdn Bhd, who held a massive 85% stake (*Utusan Express*, 1996). This company was owned in turn by Mr T. Ananda, a businessman who had a close relationship with the Prime Minister and Hanif Mohamad Omar, a former Inspector general of the Malaysian police force (Zaharom, 2000:143). The only other shareholder was Khazanah Nasional Berhad, an investment holding company of the Ministry Of Information, which held 15% of the stock (*Utusan Express*, 1996).

The latest development in Malaysia relevant to this study was the launch of NTV7. This channel also had strong links with the government and is owned by a business tycoon from Sarawak - Datuk Effendi Norwawi - a former Managing Director of the Sarawak State Economic Development Corporation, who had a close connection with the political parties in power (Zaharom and Mustafa, 2000:169). In this sense, Zaharom asserts:

"Hence as far as media, particularly television is concerned, what we have is a situation where the selective privatisation exercise continues to widely spread the tentacles of the ruling coalition and its allies across the Malaysian economy, adding economic and cultural domination to what is already virtual political domination."

(Zaharom, 1996: 167)

3.6.1 Control of the media

As outlined in the previous section, the Malaysian television industry represents a concentration of ownership, which is linked both 'directly' and 'indirectly' to the ruling political parties in power. Thus it is not surprising to see a complex relationship between ownership of the media industry and continuing state control of media (Karthigesu, 1987, 1990, 1994a, 1994b, 1995; Zaharom, 1996; Wang, 1998). Indeed Karthigesu (1990) observes that television in Malaysia has always been under the control of government from the day it first began operation. Wang (1998) and Zaharom (2000) and Zaharom and Mustafa (2000) also suggests that this phenomenon continues, even after the arrival of cable and satellite television.

As noted above, television, when first introduced in Malaysia in 1963, was under the control of the Department of Broadcasting (Lowe and Kamin, 1987; Karthigesu, 1990 and Zaharom, 1996). According to the historian Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard, the Department of Broadcasting was established in 1946, during the British occupation in Malaya. In 1950, the department was renamed the Department of Information. In 1961, the Ministry of Information was set up. It was established with the purpose of coordinating the activities of the mass media. The departments under the Ministry were the Department of Information and the Department of Broadcasting. In 1964, the Ministry was established as a full Ministry, with the appointment of a Minister. Karthigesu (1990) observes that

television from 1963 to 1969 did not have any specific declared objectives other than providing information, education and entertainment. TV, Karthigesu argues, was carefully selected to ensure that it conformed to government policy (1990:432). The attitude towards regulating television changed, however, after the outbreak of the race riots on May 13th 1969 (Lowe and Kamin, 1982 and Karthigesu 1990).

As mentioned earlier, the post-riot government sought to re-establish stability in the country by promoting racial harmony through the introduction of The National Ideology, or Rukun Negara, and a New Economic Policy. While the New Economic Policy was introduced mainly to 'restructure society' in the sense of redistributing opportunities among races and eliminating poverty across all racial boundaries (Lowe and Kamin, 1982: 5), the government also thought there was a need to tighten broadcasting organization and to establish specific objectives for broadcasters. The two most important objectives, according to Karthigesu, were:

1. to explain, in depth, and with the widest possible coverage, the policies and programmes of the government, in order to ensure maximum understanding by the public.

2. to stimulate public interest and opinion in order to achieve change in line with government requirements.

(Karthigesu, 1990:433)

Karthigesu (1990) further argues that with the establishment of these objectives, every aspect of local programming was directed to serve those objectives. Similarly, Wang (1998) pointed out that these objectives were taken as directives and have been used to define a working parameter by both government television stations ever since.

Lowe and Kamin (1982: 6) indicate that television producers in Malaysia are required to have a 'strong sense' of the 'rules' in the organization. These rules are based solely on

precedent. Lowe and Kamin pointed out that the precedents exist in two forms: written and oral decisions.

Written rules are made explicit through the National Ideology or New Economic Policy, as well as through announcements embedded in government's policies. Oral rules are those conveyed orally through procedures involving the previewing of films, censorship meetings and formal meetings in which comments are passed on about the suitability of ideas, themes or scripts. Indeed, Lowe and Kamin (1982) further suggest:

> "Together, these form the sum total of the organization's knowledge as to what is acceptable or not acceptable for transmission. The word "sensitivities" has wide currency among the personnel in Television Malaysia to describe not just these rules but also the wide range of reasons why these decisions have been and are being made". (1982:6)

The word "sensitivities" is significant as Lowe and Kamin (1982) refer to the need for all programme planners to consider potential racial and religious objections to programmes. To be sensitive can also mean to be aware of the need for all programmes to conform to, and to be consistent with, government policies. Zaharom (1996:163) similarly argues that television in Malaysia can be more appropriately seen as the government service, which acts as a mouthpiece for the government of the day.

According to Karthigesu (1994b and 1995:), since the introduction of television in Malaysia, there has been no law to regulate the stations activities, apart from the universal ones covering information, education and entertainment. With the advent of the private television station TV3 in 1984, new and more cohesive regulations, in terms of official Acts, had to be formulated in order to streamline what was broadcast by the rapidly growing number of stations. The Broadcasting Act was introduced in 1988 and was passed into law in 1989. This act was designed to allow the supervision of television (1994b: 432

and 1995:7-8). Wang (1998:78) commented that since TV3 is a private commercial company, its primary objective is to maximise profit. TV3 achieved this by providing entertainment programmes, mainly from foreign sources. These programmes were based largely on using sex and violence, to draw audiences. What is more interesting, perhaps, is that the two government channels - TV1 and TV2 - also incorporated these elements into their programmes. These development lead to the introduction of the act.

Karthigesu (1995), however, argues that this Act did not induce to positive consequences for the television industry. The Act granted enormous amounts of power to the Minister of Information. The Ministry was now responsible for determining license distribution and for the censorship of television broadcasts. It was also given the power to change any conditions stipulated in the Act. Wang (1998) notes that this Act not only enables the state to wipe out violence and sex on television, but also gave the Ministry the ability to tighten its grip on the television media (1998:78).

In 1994, the government introduced a Classification Code, mainly aimed at material shown in the cinema, but which was also aimed at programmes on television. This was a direct result of the increase in imported programmes, which had escalated with the introduction of TV3, the reshuffle of the government channels, and the creation of MetroVision and Mega TV. The National Board of Censorship announced the Classification Code, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs. There are five Classification Codes:

U	for general viewing, suitable for all
18 SG	for 18 and above - contains some aspect of horror
18 SX	for 18 and above - contains some elements of sex
18 PA	for 18 and above - contains some elements of counter culture
18 PL	combination of two or more of the above mentioned elements.

(*Berita Harian*, 8 December 1995)

By 1st January 1996, all cinema and television stations had to classify all programmes intended for broadcasting. These Classification Codes remained in force for all films and television stations during the period covered by this study.

With the advent of satellite television services, the government decided to amend the Broadcasting Act 1988. The new act, Broadcasting (Amendment) 1996, was introduced to redefine the activities of radio and television stations and allow them to introduce new transmission services. It was also intended to redefine the use of receivers so as to include parabolic dishes (not exceeding 2 foot in diameter), decoders, radar and other equipment for satellite and cable services (*New Straits Times*, 12 December 1996). With the development of new technologies such as satellite systems and the announcement of multi-media projects to develop new forms of communication services, the government merged the Ministry of Information and The Ministry of Energy, Telecom and Post under one Ministry known as The Ministry of Energy, Communication and Multimedia (MECM) (MECM,nd). The establishment of this new Ministry was accompanied by a new Act, known as the Communication and Multimedia Act 1998, which reaffirmed the main principles of the previous Act.

3.7 Conclusion

The objective of this chapter has been to provide a historical account of the evolution of television in Malaysia from 1963 to the time when the empirical research, outlined in Chapters 5 and 6 was conducted. Particular attention has been devoted to the role that television has played in nation building through attempts to shape and reinforce a national identity and national unity. The impact of social, commercial and government forces on the nature and development of television have been traced and analysed, setting up a framework for the empirical research into the perceptions of young adults in Malaysia as to the way of television deals with questions of national identity.

The authorities in Malaysia, taking a lead from their predecessors (the British colonial rulers of Malaya), were not slow to grasp the potential, firstly of radio and subsequently of television, as a tool for the promotion of national unity as demonstrated by the mission statements of TV1 and TV2. The need to promote national unity took on an added urgency following the ethnic disturbances in 1969. The government formulated the National Culture Policy (NCP) in 1971, which aimed to strengthen national unity, foster national identity and enrich the socio-economic order, with the objective of striking a balance between humanity and spirituality. Measures to be adopted in pursuance of the policy, echoing a highly selective vision by the government of what amounts to national identity, were to be based on the indigenous culture of the region. 'Suitable' elements from all the ethnic cultures were to form elements of the National Culture, and Islam was designated an important role in moulding of the National Culture. The government recognised that television represented a valuable medium for fulfilling the aims and objectives of the policy. What problems did the government have to overcome in achieving its objectives and how successful has the government been?

It has been demonstrated that from its inception in December 1963, through to the present time, the authorities have exercised a high degree of control over television in Malaysia. Whilst TV1 and TV2 were and remain directly under the control of the Ministry of Information, the first privately owned station, TV3 also remained effectively under the control of the Ministry. Indeed, to the present time all television content including that provided by the second privately owned station, MetroVision (introduced in 1995), the first cable television channel, Mega TV (a subsidiary of TV3 introduced in 1995), ASTRO, (the first satellite television system introduced in 1996) and, finally, the third privately owned station, Ntv7, (introduced in 1998), are subject to regulation by the Ministry of Information. Thus, the government through its control of the television networks possesses the means to influence programming content and thereby pursue the NCP.

The first problem encountered in providing programming that satisfied the policy was that there was a lack of local capacity to fill airtime targets in 1963. The solution at that time was to import programs, initially from the West and in particular Hollywood, which projected an American image of the world and threatened to undermine the nation building aims of the government. Despite the fact that local capacity has increased dramatically over the past 39 years, the total air time capacity of the 5 terrestrial channels, 9 cable network and 24 channels of satellite television, means that the ratio of locally produced to overseas produced programmes, far from being reduced, is likely to have decreased from a very balanced 48.8:48.1 in 1963. Even by 1969 the ratio had dropped to 37.9:55.1. The government established a highly ambitious but unrealistic target of 60:40. Imported programmes are no longer predominantly western sourced, and currently include programmes from 'Bollywood' (India), Indonesia, China and Hong Kong, though many of these are to some extent influenced by western genres.

The question arises as to why the government has allowed the proliferation of stations and extensions to airtime, which makes the implementation of the NCP more difficult. The reason is partly due to increased demand for entertainment, fuelled by an ever more affluent society. Moreover, the government's loss of influence over the media is a consequence of the success of the government's economic policies, partly because the government wished Malaysia to become a technological leader in South East Asia. This desire has resulted in the development of the 'super-corridor' which, in turn, necessitated the launch of cable and satellite television, and partly because of the arrival of the video, laser-disk and DVD entertainment media coupled with the appetite of a large sector of the Malaysian community for internationally produced entertainment. Thus, unless television actively competed with the alternative forms of entertainment and expanded its airtime and programme content, television viewing would have inevitably decreased and with it the government's control over programming content.

The government also encountered problems designing programme content that would fulfil its objectives in that the programmes had to be attractive to a very culturally and ethnically diverse range of viewers. The problem was three folds. Firstly, the western genres of programming proved to be popular to all sectors of the community. In order to compete, the local producers resorted to emulating western genres. Secondly, early attempts at implementing the NCP in programmes resulted in an over-emphasis on Malay culture, with mere cameo roles being given to those from different cultural groups. Thirdly, the different cultural groups have their own languages beside Malay and are attracted to different genres of programmes. Following criticism of this approach there has been an attempt to make programmes specifically for different cultural groups. The problem of this approach is that the audience for such programmes is limited to a specific group and does not fulfil the aim of forging a single united national identity. Related to this has been another problem, in that despite attempts to produce inter-ethnic programmes sympathetic to all groups in Malaysia, there has been a tendency to provide inaccurate, unsympathetic images of the various ethnic groups in Malaysia. This tendency, far from creating a sense of unity, has resulted in the population becoming alienated from and resentful of home produced programmes.

The dual viewpoints of national identity highlighted by the literature review in Chapter 2 above, namely self-identification by life experience and authority-defined identity, may well be evident here. Simply because audiences have largely rejected government programmes aimed at promoting a government perspective of national identity does not mean that Malaysians do not have a well-developed sense of national identity. This opens up the possibility that what amounts to identity is indeed a contested concept. Thus, the empirical research discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 seeks to discover whether or not young adults in Malaysia have developed a sense of national identity, whether that sense of identity follows the life experience or authority defined model and, most crucially, the

relative impact that the participants felt Malaysian television has had on their sense of identity.

END NOTES

[1] Malaysia was formerly known as Malaya. It attained independence in 1957. Six years latter in 1963, it became known as Malaysia, which comprises Malaya (now known as West Malaysia or Peninsular Malaysia) and Sabah and Sarwak (formerly known as British Borneo, now East Malaysia) and Singapore. In 1965, Singapore decided to leave Malaysia to form it own independent state.

[2] The Chinese dominated Malaysian Communist Party started an insurrection at the end of the second World War with the objective of overthrowing authority and taking over the country: 1969, see 'The national Operation Council Report, 1969, Part One.

[3] To date Malaysian has 24 radio stations. (Malaysia, Ministry of Information leaflet)

[4] Upon Independence, Islam was declared the official religion and the Malay language the national language as well as for official uses. The use of other languages was also allowed but not for official uses.

[5] For details, See Ongkili (1982) especially chapters 3 and 4.

[6] Malaya (sia) practices parliamentary democracy and is ruled as a Constitutional Monarchy with his Majesty The Yang Di Pertuan Agong as the Head of the country. Executive Authority i.e. the power to govern is vested by article 39 in the Yang di Pertuan Agong but is exercisable by cabinet of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister (Malaysia, Official Year Book 1996:13-14).

[7] Participation in the Commonwealth ensured many economic advantages to developing countries such as Malaya. It benefited from the capital aid grants from advanced Commonwealth countries, and received technical educational assistance from the Colombo Plan. Under this plan, training for experts in various economics, educational and professional was offered (Karthigesu,1990:92-95).

[8] Both Canada and Malaysia have a diverse number of languages. In the case of Canada, English, French, Italian, German and others. In Malaysia, Malay, Chinese, Tamil, English and others. (Karthigesu 1990;94).

[9] One of the features of the report was that Jones suggested that television should be run as separate department to radio, so as to ensure efficiency of administration. (Karthigesu 1994:31)

[10] See Karthigesu, (1994:38) for in depth explanation of staff recruitment.

[11] For details on productions teams, see Karthigesu (1994:52-53)

[12] For details of the general elections of 1969, see Ongkili (1982) especially pages 199-203.

[13] See Ongkili (1982) and The National Operations Council (1969) for details of the May 13 riots.

[14] For detailed results of the general election in 1982, see (Karthigesu 1994b:172).

[15] The Fleet Group also owned *The New Straits Times*, *The Utusan Melayu Group,* and *The Nanyang Group* (Karthigesu,1994a).

[16] MetroVision ceased transmission in 2000.

[17] The launching of the MEASAT1 and 2 took place in French Guyana, USA. The Satellite System was built by the American Company - Hughes Space and Communication in El Segundo, California. Both Satellites were specifically designed for broadcasting and communications service. (ASTRO Fact File, 1997).

[18] For further reading on the Multimedia Supercorridor project see Zaharom and Mustafa (nd), "IT Strategies in Malaysia: The multi media Super Corridor" available at *http://www.unrisd.org/infotech/conference/msc 1.htm.*

[19] Malaysia had been a communications satellite user since April 1970, when the country leased the Intelsat transponder from Indonesia at a cost of about US$ 40 million a year. See Ishak, I. (1989).

[20] MEASAT footprint coverage included Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, India, Vietnam, Mynmar, Hong Kong, Korea, Southern China, The Philippines, Northern Australlia, Japan, Laos, Cambodia and Guam. (ASTRO Fact File, 1997).

[21] The five local channels are Astro Ria (Malay Channel), Astro Wah Lai Toi (Chinese Channel) and Astro Vanaavil (Indian Channel). The two government Channels included TV 1 and TV 2. (ASTRO Facts File, 1997)

[22] The seventeen Channels, includes Movie Channels such as HBO, Star Movies, Star Asian Movie Channel, MGM, News Channels, CNNI, Asia Business News, ABN and CNBC, Music Channels, MTV Asia and Channel V, Sports Channels, ESPN and Star Sports, Documentary Channel, Discovery and family Channels, The Disney Channel, NBC Entertainment, Star Plus, TNT and Cartoon Network (ASTRO Fact File).

[23] Ntv7 introduced a wide range of television programmes, including dramas, sitcoms, entertainment programmes, game shows, Current affairs, children programmes and Movies. In addition there is also the station's news bulletins in Malay, English and Mandarin. (Ntv7 Fact File).

[24] The other two: Department of Radio, and Department of Film.

[25] The four individuals were the publishing company's managing director, Khalid Haji Ali, Mohamed Noor Mutalib, Abdul Kadir Jasin and Ahmad Nazri Abdullah (Gomez,1994:134)

[26] For details of the mergers, and takeovers of local corporate sector, see Gomez (1994).

- Chapter Four -

Audience and Television

4.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe different efforts to theorise the relationship between the audience and television. The chapter is divided into three main sections.

Using a historical approach, Section One traces several important stages in the evolution of theories regarding the audience. It focuses, in particular, on the development of one of the first major theories about audiences, which suggests that media have a strong effect on audience members. This theory suggests that audiences have little, if any power in determining the influence of what they watch on television. The second part of this section focuses on theorists that assert that audiences play an active role in their exposure to, selection of, and engagement with television programmes in order to satisfy certain needs. The third part of this section reveals the complexity of audiences' understanding of television, and discusses pertinent elements of the research literature where it has been argued that audiences are 'active', and as such capable of producing their own interpretation of the media content.

A general review of previous studies of television and young adults is provided in Section Two, before attention turns to focus on studies concentrating on Malaysia. This section also provides an understanding of the relationships between young people and television messages.

Finally, the Section Three investigates studies relating to television and national identity. This section looks at the role of television in articulating a sense of national identity, and examines studies that relate to the audience and issues of national identity.

4.1. Theories of the audience: An historical review

The first major attempts to develop theories on the relationship between the audience and the media took place after the First World War in the 1920's and 1930's. At that time, the political elite was using Fascist propaganda in order to manipulate the mass audience in Germany. This was done mainly through the media. It was assumed that audiences received propaganda messages without questioning them. Described as 'Hypodermic Needle Theory', this idea suggests that the media have a strong, direct effect on the audience. The media system can be viewed, therefore, as a tool which has the power to change people's thoughts and attitudes (Morley, 1980; O'Sullivan *et al*, 1994; Dutton,1997). This theory has its critics, however. Dutton (1997:105) argued that the 'Hypodermic Needle Theory' was not based on scientific evidence, but rather on speculation regarding the media's role in bringing about certain social changes at that time.

A turning point in the investigation of the effect of the media on the audience was a study carried out by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaundett in the 1940's. Using survey techniques, they attempted to find out the extent to which propaganda influenced how people vote. The research was carried out during the US Presidential Election campaign using a panel sample, whereby the subjects were interviewed on a regular basis for a six-month period before the election (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 1994: 127; Dutton, 1997:108). This method was chosen in order for the researcher to be able to discover how the voters' exposure to the media shaped their opinion and the final voting decision. The results published in 1948 failed to prove that the media acted as a 'hypodermic needle', having a direct effect on the audience. What became evident is that other factors, such as the role of the 'opinion leader', "people whose political view was trusted" (O'Sullivan *et al.*,1994:128), had become significant. The findings outlined that audiences have established attitudes, and are selective in their exposure to the media. This theory became known as the 'Two Step Flow' model, which rather than focussing on the media as a main cause of influence or

affect, identified the role of the 'opinion leader' as being more significant. The study concluded that media influence on audiences was one of reinforcement; the media did not cause an actual change in people's attitudes. Thus, this study suggests that the effect of the media on audiences is limited, because audiences are shown to be active rather than passive in their negotiation of meaning.

Since the 1960's, media sociologists attempting to discover the effects of the media on the audience have undertaken important work. In the case of one of Gerbner's (1976), (cited in Dutton,1997:115) studies, for example, it was argued that audiences were becoming more individualistic, and thus relied heavily on the media as a main source of information regarding the outside world. He claimed that television has a 'cultivation effect' that shapes our view of social reality. His study, relying on content analysis, discovered that television distorted reality, and he suggested that audiences tend to over-estimate the power of television. His findings questioned whether television has the power to influence people or merely acts as an enforcer of the cultivation effect.

Bandura (1963) further investigated research on the audience. He carried out laboratory experiments to investigate children's responses to film. A film was shown which featured a child hitting a doll (see also Livingstone, 1996:308). The experiment measured the responses of children watching this activity. The results showed that those who watched the aggression tended to copy the action. However, Branston and Stafford (1996:311), noted that it is difficult to reach a firm conclusion as to the influence of the media on the moral development of children, namely because a controlled laboratory experiment has very limited application to the complicated conditions under which we interact with the media.

The recognition that the audience play an active role in their exposure, selection and interpretation of media text has allowed researchers to investigate how audiences use the media to satisfy their personal needs (Blumler and Katz,1974; Morley, 1980; Ang 1990).

Blumler and Katz (1974) introduced 'Uses and Gratification' theory. Their research attempted to answer questions as to why people use television. They did not intend to question how media messages affect the audience. Using unstructured group discussions, they compiled and listed various responses given by respondents and sent these to a cross section of television viewers in an effort to discover the main reason for their television use. The findings uncovered various television uses, including, diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance (See also Dutton, 1997). However, Ang (1990) identified three weaknesses of this approach. Firstly, she asserts that uses and gratification only takes into account individual uses of the media, and the psychological gratification derived from them. Other factors were ignored, such as social context. She further argues that this approach does not take into account the fact that using the media is not always for gratification. In some cases, media use may be forced on people, i.e. parental control, rather than free a choice (Ang, 1990: 159-160). Secondly, she claimed that this approach was concerned with finding out why people use the media, but it failed to analyse exactly what kind of meaning people get out of their interactions (Ang, 1990: 160). Finally, she asserts that as long as people are satisfied with what they get out of television viewing, there will be little demand to change it. However, this view ignores the possibility that alternative kinds of media output might be more gratifying for other people. Thus, the question of the relationship of the audience and the media has become increasingly complicated.

Further studies have shown that different people interpret media texts differently. Reception studies, established in the 1970's opened up a new approach to engage audience interpretation on media content (text) (Corner, 1996:280). For Ang (1990:160) media text required meaning at the reception end; that is, when they are read, viewed and heard. In this sense reception analysis is able to connect both audience and the media using empirical research tools in the attempt to locate aspects, in which meanings of the media are produced (Corner, 1996:160). Most importantly, reception analysis recognised 'active audience' to

construct meanings out of media output (Ang,1996:160). Corner has stated that, "Analyzing 'reception' was not to be a matter of checking out whether or not audience members had managed to 'get the meaning' of items but, instead, a matter of looking at *the different meanings* which they constructed *from* items" (1996:282). Thus, in the 1970's, a new theoretical framework was developed to further analyse the complexity of audience interpretation of media text.

Adopting an approach from semiology, Hall in 1973, sought to rethink the relationship between media content (the text) and the audience. In looking at the relationship between media text and audience, he stressed the importance of accounting for both the source (encoder) and the receiver (decoder) of the media at the same time (Hall 1996: 131). He asserts that the encoded meanings are not perfectly symmetrical with the decoded meanings, as meaning is 'polysemic' or open to diverse interpretations. Morley (1980) develops Hall's ideas by investigating three possible decoding positions, that is, the 'dominant', 'negotiated' and 'oppositional' positions, through an empirical study of audiences. By 'dominant', it is said that audiences are assumed to interpret the media content according to the intention of the decoder. Under the 'negotiated' position, audiences are aware of the dominant meaning, but their interpretation is be based in part on their own views, which diverge from it. In the 'oppositional' readings, audiences contradict the dominant meaning in the media text (Hall 1996: 136-138).

Morley's (1980), work on the *Nationwide Audience*, marks a turning point in the history of media studies. The study was aimed at the audience decoding, or reading, of the BBC current affairs magazine 'Nationwide'. The study involves a series of in-depth interviews with a variety of different groups, drawn from different socio-economic groups. The study demonstrated that different people from different social backgrounds offer different interpretations of media texts. Morley claims that it is necessary to examine the question of

how social positions, and more particularly discourse positions, produce these specific readings (Morley, 1980: 134).

The framework used by Morley was largely the same as the one proposed by Hall, whereby audience decoding would fall into the 'preferred/dominant', the 'negotiated' or the 'oppositional' category. However, Morley's work revealed the complexity of the discourses of interpretation. Multiple discourses were apparent in the decoding of the twenty-nine groups. These could not be matched with social class. Furthermore, his findings indicated the importance of socio-cultural forces and divisions beyond those of social class, such as ethnicity and gender. Overall, the 'Nationwide' study provided a way forward in analysing audience interpretation's of media texts (See also Marris and Thornham, 1996: 468).

In the 1980s, studies increasingly focused on social and cultural factors and their influence on the reading of media texts by the audience. Brunsdon (1987) suggested that women are more competent to 'read' soap operas because it requires feminine skills and a concern with personal life (see also Barker, 1997: 118). Matabane's (1988) study of sub-cultural experience and television viewing demonstrates the relationship between viewing and subcultures. His aim was to examine how different types of viewing affect viewer selectivity, and the how differences in social structure affect viewing experiences. Matabane (1988: 125-126) used a telephone survey of 161 adults of Afro-American descent, between 7 October and 1 November 1984, in Washington DC. His sample was selected by income and racial composition and divided into three groups, black, a white and a racially mixed group. His findings indicate that the reasons governing the selection of television programmes is based on social experience within a sub-culture and the individuals location within that sub-culture. For example, the black neighbourhood residents with a low education but active in the community preferred to watch 'The A-Team', which features an integrated cast. This arguably indicates that the group regarded

the integrated cast to be realistic. Due to their limited education and experience, Matabane suggests that they may have failed to recognise the hidden racist ideology in the programme (Matabane, 1988: 125-126).

A more recent study by Gillispie (1995) of South Asian youths living in London investigated their use of television in daily life. Gillespie stated that some of her respondents considered *Home and Away* to be racist because it did not include any minority characters. This study furnishes us with further evidence regarding the danger of simply inferring a 'preferred reading' of the media text without investigating the various cultural interpretations of different audiences (see also Dutton,1997). Thus, it is important to recognise that different interpretations or readings of media texts are based on the audiences' social and cultural backgrounds. As a result, in recent years ethnography has been regarded as the best way to approach audience research. As Gillespie states:

> "Traditional models of research have above all failed to approximate the lived experiences of the audience and to deliver the kind of insights required to understand the complexities of television and of it's audiences embedded in wider social, political and economic context"
>
> (Gillespie:1995:53-54).

She further added that Ang (1985), Lull (1990) and Morley (1991) have all claimed that ethnographic methods drawn from anthropology have been championed in many audience studies. This is due to the fact, she suggests, that ethnographic methods produce 'detailed' information about the informants, for example, their pattern of consumption and their interpretation of television texts. Gillespie has defined the ethnographic method as 'long term participation' (about 18 months period of time in her study), based on 'extensive field work', which requires the researcher to 'immerse' him or herself in the audiences' societies, and to become 'fully accepted' by them. This aspect is vital in understanding the culture of

the subject studied and in interpreting the message from the subjects' point of view (Gillespie, 1995: 56). Several methods are sometimes used by the ethnographer, such as discussion groups, face-to-face interviews and participant observation (Dutton:1997).

Although ethnography has been recognised as one of the most useful methods for audience studies, this method has proved to have its own weaknesses. Morley (1992) noted that the interpretation of data from participant observation is only from the point of view of the researcher. Therefore, there is a possibility of misinterpretation where the data is concerned. Dutton (1997) further commented that there was a limit to the nature of the participant's observation in the natural setting. This raised questions about peoples' behaviour in 'natural' settings when the researcher did not seek their views. Thus, even the most sophisticated methods employed for audience studies have inherent limitations, as indeed did earlier, less sophisticated methods.

The different approaches outlined above show several of the many ways the relationship between the audience and the media text has been studied. This brief historical summary is by no means comprehensive. However, this review does provide a basis for understanding the complexity of studying the television audience. For the purposes of this thesis, however, the next part of the discussion will centre on the relationship of young adults to television, and will review previous findings on audiences' relationship to national identity. The review will focus on international studies before moving on to examine Malaysia.

4.2 Television and young adults

This section examines the relationship between the audience and the media with particular reference to young adults. One of the most significant qualitative studies of audience relationships to the media was the work by Gillespie (1995). As noted above, she used ethnographic methods to investigate how Punjabi youths living in Southall, London, used and interpreted television messages in their everyday lives within their own community.

Viewing television in their community was understood by Gillespie as a 'domestic ritual' that affirmed a collection identity. Television genres such as news, and Indian films, tend to bring all the family members together and encourage discussion. In contrast, other genres such as pop programmes and American films (on video) tended to unite only the young audience, encouraging discussion among this group. Her findings also revealed that Punjabi youths preferred watching television when their parents were not present. This is because they felt more relaxed watching such programmes among their peer groups (Gillespie, 1995: 61).

What was even more interesting, in my view, is that her study revealed that the viewing of Indian films encouraged parents and children to have discussions about traditional values and cultural aspects of Punjabi life, such as the caste system, arranged marriages, and similar moral conflicts which are common themes in Indian film. Thus, she further concluded that Indian films serve as a tool for the articulation of views between the parents and their children. She also claimed that many parents have used Indian film to foster cultural and traditional values in their children. However, Gillespie also suggests that the young audience of the Indian community used film to deconstruct traditional values. Western soaps, such as *Neighbours,* allowed the young audience to make comparisons between their culture and 'white culture' (1995:87-174). In the Indian community, the discussion of teenage romance has been regarded as 'taboo' within the parental culture (Gillespie, 1995: 64).

In this context, Barker (1997: 123) has noted that soaps often serve as a site for discussion amongst young people and also as a point of conversation for the exploration of values between parents and children. In one of his studies, Barker conducted a discussion group where the aim was to find out how young adults used the television soap (*East Enders*). The findings suggested that British-Asian teenagers used *East Enders* as a discussion tool (such as plot prediction) and were involved in discussions on the issues about family,

relationships and the gendering of the programmes. In this case, Barker noted that the audience plays an active role in the reproduction of familial ideology (1997:137).

In Malaysia, studies of young adults' interpretations of television are limited. In this sense Zaharom (2000) pointed out that audience research in Malaysia is underdeveloped. In general, he argues, the study of audiences has been mainly concerned with quantitative approaches. He further added, these studies tend to be oriented to the needs of governmental policy. The data often tend to be presented in 'positivistic' ways, which limit in-depth interpretations with enough complexity where the television audience is concerned (2000: 147). Further, Zaharom identified two major obstacles that limit audience study in Malaysia. Firstly, he noted that government control limits the development of 'critical' audience research. In this sense he asserts that:

> "In an environment where the education system preaches conformity, where alternative explanations are constantly being curbed, and where the dominant religious/value system is profoundly conservative, the assumption of a generalized "active" media audience would be rather premature if not down right naïve".
>
> (Zaharom, 2000: 148-149).

Secondly, he asserts that rather than focusing on the critical and controversial issues of 'power and control' of the government over the media institutions, many audience studies have chosen to disregard this issues (2000:149). It is very rare for audience studies in Malaysia to go beyond these parameters. These very aspects help to explain the lack of audience research in Malaysia particularly within the qualitative approach.

What is presently available in Malaysia is mostly quantitative in nature and tends to provide data regarding what type of genre is preferred, how many hours are watched and a comparison between viewing of local and imported programmes. This sort of data is

normally provided by the Independent Media Survey Institution, Survey Research Malaysia (SRM), which is similar to the Audience Research Board (BARB) in the United Kingdom. In most cases, an automatic channel and control devices are installed in television sets. Another source, which works in similarly ways to this organisation, is the Department of Film and Television Malaysia, under the Ministry of Information Malaysia. These studies are used to measure audience ratings and determine which channels and which programmes are most frequently watched. In short, these organisations are concerned with producing data regarding viewing patterns and trends in media consumption.

One important attempt to conduct an audience study of young adults in Malaysia using a qualitative approach was made by Wilson (1996). His study involved looking at how participants responded to television talk shows *(Oprah Winfrey* and a local talk show, *Global,* as well as popular United State television dramas (*L.A Law* and *Good Advice*). Using a focus groups method, he approached 64 participants, involving students and selected Malaysian citizens, to view extracts of different television programmes. His findings suggest that the audiences' relationship to television talk show and drama may be characterised as 'playful' (1996: 48). In this sense he asserts that participant were able to "establish meaning while being involved and/or critical, creative, selective, dis(engaging) with programmes (1996: 60-61). Typical examples were where participants agreed or disagreed with what was said in the talk show and where participants identified with television characters and became engaged with storylines (Wilson, 1996). It is worth noting that this study was the very first of it kind to take an approach within the qualitative tradition of studying television audiences in Malaysia.

As mentioned before, studies of young adults' relationship to the media are very limited in number in Malaysia. Thus it is not surprising to see that much of the current data available on the young adults are generally gathered from quantitative approaches. In the research conducted by Jaafar (1997:8) revealed that audiences aged 24+ watch television the most

when compared to children and students. In the research by, Ministry of Information Malaysia (1998:8) it was revealed that the age group 20-29 spends more time watching television in comparison to other age groups. However, this research did not specify how many hours this group spends watching television, nor did it provide any understanding about the audiences' interpretation and understanding of the media text.

In another study on young adults, conducted by 'The Young Times Organisation', a subsidiary of the *New Strait Times* newspaper, in 1995 (New Straits Times,13 September 1995), it was found that teenagers spent 3.2 hours per day watching television, doubling the viewing time on weekends to 6.4 hours. The results of this study revealed that the top programmes that this age group preferred to watch were imported programmes, namely 'The X files', 'Sea Quest', and 'National Geographic'. Their preference for watching imported programmes was due to their perception that the local programmes available on Malaysian television were of a very poor quality (for example, having a weak plot, poor acting and a low budget). They claimed that local productions underestimated the Malaysian audience by broadcasting low-quality programmes. This study also indicates that teenagers felt they learn more from documentaries and educational programmes. For example, they suggested that they learnt about environmental issues, science and technology, culture and the lifestyles of others. They also learn through programmes showing details of different people and their languages (*New Straits Times*, 13 September 1995).

A more recent study of the relationship of young adults in Malaysia to television was conducted by Latifah and Samsudin (1999). Their study was an exploration of the influence of media penetration on young adults. It involved collecting data at two levels. Specifically, a series of focus groups interviews were held involving involve 48 participants aged 18-25 within three major group ethnic groups, namely Malay, Chinese and Indian.

Their study also involved a nationwide survey using questionnaires distributed to 1,700 respondents aged 13-25, but again centring around three major ethnic groups (1999: 4).

Although, this study made use of focus groups to collect empirical data, the results presented were mainly concerned with quantitative statistics. Their findings suggest that the majority of the young adults have greater access to terrestrial television in comparison with cable and satellite television (Latifah and Samsudin, 1999: 5). Results also revealed that listening to the radio and watching television has been the main leisure activity among the young adults surveyed, although there is an emerging trend among young adults to engage themselves with computers and video games. Their findings also revealed that in general young adults preferred to watch entertainment programmes, such as musical programmes, sitcoms, health and education-based programmes. It was also found that talk shows, political news and religious programmes were less popular within the young adults (Latifah and Samsudin, 1999: 6).

Although all of these research studies provide interesting aspects of audience and television, most of these investigations were unable to provide in-depth information on audience interpretations of television images. In general, these studies have been mainly concerned with ethnic majority viewpoints and so have dismissed those voiced by minority groups. Bearing in mind limitations of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches in studying media audiences, this thesis hopes to open up new insights and contribute to valuable data for the further development of audience research in Malaysia.

4.3 Television and National identity

This section provides additional perspectives about the role of television in articulating a sense of national identity. In seeking to understand the process, the section will begin by outlining some debates surrounding the importance of television in the nation state. So far, we have identified television as being a useful medium in constructing the notion of

national identity. The extent to which television has an impact is still hotly debated among academics, however. We turn our attention next to Malaysian television and its concept of national identity.

The effort of the Malaysian government to formulate a uniform identity - was made apparent after the ethnic riots in 1969 (see Chapter Two). As noted, the government introduced a National Culture Policy (NCP) in 1971, with the aim of uniting all Malaysians. This included the formulation of a 'Malaysian National Identity'. The NCP seminar (Kuala Lumpur 1971), recognised television, among other institutions, as an important medium in promoting and articulating a sense of national unity, and thus fostering the formation of a national identity in Malaysia (Dol Ramli, 1973: 67). As a result, television in Malaysia has been 'encouraged' by the state government to produce a variety of programmes based on the fundamental ideas of the NCP: that is, to include in programming the indigenous culture of the region, the culture of the non-indigenous communities and that of the Islamic religion (Lowe and Kamin, 1982; Karthigesu, 1994; Noorbathi, 1996; Wang and Mustaffa, 1996; Zaharom, 1996; Zaharom and Mustafa, 2000).

The study of television content in Malaysia reveals that the official role of television in fostering national unity, and in further formulating a distinctive Malaysian national identity, becomes problematic when only a section of its community is given priority. Karthigesu (1994a, 1994b), for example, suggests that an uneven programme distribution between the Malaysian population, with a heavy concentration on programmes only for the majority groups (the Malay and Chinese), does not encourage the promotion of national unity among the various ethnic groups in Malaysia.

In the Blue Paper (see Chapter Three), it was pointed out that Brickenden in 1963, suggested that the distribution of television programmes in various languages be divided in the ratio of 45:30:25 among Malay, Chinese and English language speakers. This would allow for a population in 1963 divided 45: 40:10: 5 into Malay, Chinese and Indian and

other racial groups. The absence of any Indian programmes for the Indian speaking community has resulted in dissatisfaction and complaints. Later the government agreed to change the distribution of programmes to 45: 30: 20: 5 for Malay, Chinese, English and Tamil. After a careful consideration of the possibility of implementing the proposed ratio, Brickenden amended the ratio to 39: 26: 26: 9 (Karthigesu, 1994b: 35). The arrival of commercial television in 1984 resulted in a competition between TV Malaysia and TV3, thereby encouraging the two stations to provide more Chinese and Indian programmes (Karthigesu, 1994a: 87-88). The competition also resulted in the introduction of the 'Chinese and Indian belt' (a series of Chinese or Indian dramas) to attract more viewers.

However, Noor Bathi (1996:145) has observed that selective scheduling according to ethnicity has had negative implications on the effort to promote inter-ethnic relationships through television. She further asserts that Malay and locally produced dramas centre around one particular ethnic group, and do not encourage interaction between multi-ethnic groups in Malaysia (1996: 153). Similarly, Wang and Mustafa (1996:272) point out that Malay drama, and locally produced Chinese drama, do not reflect the social reality of the multi-ethnic dimensions of Malaysian society. This is mainly because most of the formats and plots of this genre tend to focus on one particular ethnic group, thus giving the impression that each ethnic group lives independently from other ones in Malaysia.

In a recent study conducted for the Mass Media Report in Peninsular Malaysia (TV, Video, Movie and Cineplex 1997) it was shown that more Malays own a television than any other ethnic group. Malay groups also watched television more than any other ethnic groups in Malaysia, followed by the Chinese and the Indian groups. In terms of age-groups, the 20-29 age-group view the most television, followed by 30-39 and then the 40-49, lastly 49+. It was found that the age group between 15-19 viewed television the least (Ministry of Information,1998). Given the fact that television habits amongst a Malaysian audience are

highly 'ethnic based', questions can be asked regarding the creation of a distinctive Malaysian national identity.

Some effort to promote inter-ethnic relationships was made in the production of a local sitcom (Noor Bathi, Wang and Mustafa, 1996). However, the effort to promote programmes that transcend ethnic boundaries has often resulted in negative representations of certain ethnic groups. Taylor and Willis (1999: 40) assert that representation is a site of struggle about meaning. They further suggest that aspects of television representations can lead to the 'stereotyping' of groups or of an individual. They define stereotyping as the:

> "...selection and construction of undeveloped, generalised signs which categorise social groups or individual members of group. The crude selected signs used to construct stereotypes usually represent the values, attitude behaviour and background of the group concerned. Implicit within the stereotypes is the fact that signs chosen make common assumption about the group in question" (Taylor and Willis, 1991: 41).

What is evident in studies by Noor Bathi, Wang and Mustafa (1996) is that local sitcoms broadcast by Malaysia television have, to some extent, promoted a negative perception about ethnic groups in Malaysia. Noor Bathi (1996: 156) points out that most Indian characters in the local sitcoms are portrayed as tight-fisted money-lenders, Indian women as poor and dependent, Chinese as successful business people, Malay men as obsessed with the idea of having a second wife and Malay women as gossips and dispensers of advice. Additionally, Wang and Mustafa (1996: 273) noted that the manner in which Indian or Chinese characters speak are subject to exaggeration, thereby further distorting their image. In this sense, Noor Bathi asserts that: "many incidents of race/ethnic stereotyping occur as a consequence of prioritising humour and this may be seen as a flaw in the effort to promote inter ethnic understanding" (Noor Bathi, 1996: 155).

Apart from locally produced dramas and sitcoms, other television genres such as television advertisements claim to play a crucial role in promoting a sense of national identity in Malaysia. Holden (2001) asserts that Malaysian advertising is intentionally used as a tool to promote racial harmony between the different ethnic backgrounds. He identified three distinctive ways that the Malaysian government has consciously used advertising images to transmit national integration and identity. Firstly, in an effort to avoid ethnic divisions, a false sense of homogeneity was created by banishing all foreigners from the context. Thus, only indistinguishable images or characters which cannot easily be tagged as Indian, Chinese or Malay were used, to reduce a multi-ethnic group to one group: 'We Malaysians'. Secondly, images that were available on television advertisements were centred on a sense of 'locality', the place of belonging. In this way, borders are defined and indigenous life is situated in time and place and thus is made increasingly prominent. Thirdly, national identity, Holden claims, is fostered by inserting ideological messages into text. One typical example was the achievement of the 1997 Malaysian ascent on Mount Everest, initiated by the Prime Minister, who promoted the view that 'Malaysians can dream and achieve' (2001: 286-287).

Wang and Mustafa (1996) assert that the construction of a national identity becomes more problematic when only the ethnic majority, the Malays, to lesser extent the Chinese, are represented on television, whilst other ethnic minorities, are rarely featured on television.

During the 1990s, television in Malaysia has shown an increase in local production. There are more Malay, Chinese and Indian dramas, but according to Zaharom (1996) most locally produced programmes are mere copies from the West. This phenomenon can be regarded as the global becoming local (glocalisation) in order to give ostensibly consumers what they want, meeting the 'needs' of the local market. He further concludes that:

> "...perhaps necessary compromise is fast becoming an unholy alliance between trans-national media companies and the local ruling elites. It would appear that

> in their seemingly relentless drive to get as much revenue as is feasible from television, the Malaysian policy makers, consciously or otherwise, have aligned themselves with the transnational actors, leading Malaysian television even further into the national marketplace and its attendant pressures. At the same time it would appear that any notions presumably sincere, about creating a national identity have been pushed further down the list of priorities"
>
> (Zaharom, 1996: 169-170).

This raises important questions about the place of national identity and national culture. Not only has global television been seen as a threat to Malaysian national cultural identity but at the national level itself, television in Malaysia is being accused of being biased in the representation of the nation. Television in Malaysia only highlights major ethnic groups, and marginalises other minorities. As Mohammadi (1996) observed: "(...) in domestic relations the 'national' is itself a site of struggle with a variety of 'local' identities and voices in contention" (1996:189).

Fitzgerald (1991) refers to the work of Bonnemaison (1985) and its claim that cultural identity in the Pacific is essentially a 'geographic identity'. These identities, he claimed, "flow from memories and values attached to places" (cited in Fitzgerald, 1999: 204). However, Fitzgerald argues that over time, migration has brought about a shift in ideas of place and subsequently shifts in the loci of identity. In this way he raised fundamental questions regarding the maintenance of identity over long periods of time (Fitzgerald 1999: 204). He questioned what happens when the individual has little understanding of past generations. More specifically, he posed a question for the New Zealand-born Cook Islanders, regarding their attachment to nationhood. He also addressed the question of the focus of identity and whether or not electronic media have any impact on the identity of this new generation (Fitzgerald, 1991: 205). Fitzgerald attempts to investigate the 'aspirations' and 'strivings' of the second generation of the New Zealand born Cook Islanders who live

in Wellington, New Zealand. His study involved participant observation and extensive interviews using questions that probe respondents aspirations regarding language, marriage, church attendance, work habits, return visits to the Cook Island, community participation and the 'hopes' and 'fears' for their children (Fitzgerald, 1991: 205). Results from the study revealed that identity for the New Zealand born was more often situational, more often symbolic than 'real'. He further suggested that identity is under constant negotiation, being created within certain social contexts.

With regard to the role of media in society, Fitzgerald's findings show that the media have changed the focus of an 'identity of place' because the media have diffused the sense of group identity traditionally associated with place. He further notes that even the first generation of islanders identified themselves as 'Pacific Islanders', rather than specifically as 'Rarotangans' or 'Aitutakians'. Thus he claims that the media have influenced the rules of social behaviour, "Neither generational position nor fact of migration fully accounts for these differences between generations" (Fitzgerald, 1991: 211). Fitzgerald concludes, therefore, that the media play an important role in communication because of their potential to educate the public regarding a host of issues, including ethnic issues. He sees the growth in the media in New Zealand as having contributed to a positive response to ethnic diversity. He also suggests that there should be more integrated news coverage so as to further legitimatise ethnicity issues in New Zealand (1991:210).

In the context of Malaysia, Grenfells' (1979) study of audience-media relationships was a starting point in an attempt to evaluate the mass media's role in society. Grenfell's study 'Switch On: Switch Off': Mass Media Audience in Malaysia' was based on a series of media indices and surveys in 1975, as well as on a series of reports on television ratings (Grenfell, 1979: 127). His findings reveal that television played a significant role in Malaysian society. Specifically, television appeared to have been used as the primary visual content in a multi-lingual society. He suggested that in order to support a specific national 'goal', television should be seen as the primary source for transmitting national

ideas (Grenfell, 1979: 149). His study revealed that in urban areas, Malays are frequent viewers in comparison to other ethnic groups, and he noted that they also spent more time watching than is typical for other ethnic groups (Grenfell, 1979: 148).

Grenfell's findings also revealed that there was a general pattern of television viewing within various ethnic groups. The Malay audience preferred to watch TV1, which broadcast programmes in both Malay and English, whilst other groups preferred to watch TV 2, which broadcast in all the four major languages in Malaysia, namely Malay, English, Chinese and Indian. Based on his study regarding the relative media exposure of various ethnic groups in Malaysia, he suggests that television in Malaysia could be an important medium for delivering national goals (Grenfell, 1979: 149).

Kaur (1979:142) found that Malaysian television programmes have typically encouraged a type of viewing habits that is communally-based rather than nationally-based. She states that: "This situation originates from the language difficulties arising out of the individual demands of the Malay, Chinese, Indian and English language groups, each of which is significant in terms of proportionate size and political demands" (cited in Noor Bathi,1996: 148).

Findings by Karthigesu (1988) based on a survey of critical opinion's held by audience members suggest that the respondents claimed that television in Malaysia was not giving a balanced view of society. Viewers claimed that television in Malaysia only served specific political groups, namely the government. Thus, the role of television in Malaysian society can be questioned. It would seem that in this context at least, television does not provide sufficient space for other political viewpoints, especially those of opposition parties. The study suggests, therefore, that television in Malaysia acts as a tool for espousing government ideology without offering enough alternative views (Karthigesu, 1988: 313).

Karthigesu's (1988) study similarly revealed that television usually only serves the interests of specific races, economic and social classes, and political groups, mostly the Malays.

More specifically, in terms of economic class, television only served the middle and upper income groups and as for the political groups, it only served the ruling party. He observes that: "in spite of all the short-comings attributed to imported foreign programmes, they were the ones that united the TV audience, while local programmes, in effect divided them into segments" (1988:323). He also concluded that television's contribution to nation building was only to strengthen the ruling power and its ideology. The promotion of a segment of a nation's social composition, while ignoring minority religious and language groups (as well as disadvantaged minority classes), has not helped in the promotion of nation building in Malaysia (Karthigesu, 1988: 323).

Another finding of research conducted by Samsudin (1991) and Mohd.Nor (1993), respectively, is that media habits among audiences are highly ethnically-based. This statement is further illustrated in Noor Bathi (1996), who has shown that Malays (27.6 %), Indian (7.3%) and Chinese (5.2%) groups like to watch privatised Malay drama. In this sense, she asserts that the Malay viewer is likely to watch more Malay programmes, whilst Chinese and Indian viewers prefer to watch programmes in their own language. If there is a Malay dubbed programme it only attracts the Malay community in the main. She also pointed that "only 10 % of the non-Malay audience views (on a regular basis) programmes that generally appeal to the Malay audience, more Malays view programmes in Chinese and Tamil than the Indian or the Chinese" (Noor Bathi, 1996: 153). When divided by languages, the percentage of Indians who watch television in the English language is higher compared to both Malays and Chinese. In the three ethnic groups, the Malays view more television compared to Chinese or Indian. Her findings reveal that more Indians watch television in the English language compared with the Malays and Chinese. It seems therefore that television in Malaysia is unable to unite its nation (Noor Bathi, 1996: 153).

4.4 Conclusions

Finding suitable methods to study audience interpretations of media texts has not been an easy task. Researchers relying on a quantitative approach are often unable to explain audience interpretations of the media text, except by producing statistical charts. In sociology and cultural studies, many researchers use qualitative methods to uncover audience interpretations of media texts, with the aim of revealing the ideological meaning that an audience takes from texts. Although there are many approaches in studying audience interpretations of the media, each study will necessarily have its own relative strengths and weaknesses.

The evidence from the earlier discussion demonstrated that young adults tend to learn much about their culture and identity through information provided by television. Whilst previous audience studies in Malaysia do reveal that audiences tend to use media texts as a form of identification and information in general, few of these studies provide the basis for an in-depth discussion of audience interpretations of media texts. Previous studies have suggested that media activities within Malaysian audiences are highly ethnically-based. Content analysis reveals that imported programmes dominate Malaysian television. There have been moves on the part of the Malaysian government to increase the percentage of local programmes, although what is evident is that local programmes tend to copy western genres in many ways. Another observation made by these studies is that there is a tendency towards stereotyping ethnic minority characters on television in Malaysia. This raises an important question as to the role of television in promoting the concept of national identity. This is a key reason why this study examines the perception of young Malaysian adults of television's portrayal of national identity and also investigates the extent to which ethnicity influences perceptions of national identity through television.

- Chapter Five -

Methodology

5.0 Introduction

The study of media audiences has a long history. The previous chapter outlined that the post-war period has been particular significant for scholars investigating media audiences. There are many ways of studying media audiences. Some of the classic examples used to study media audiences involve the use of surveys. Lazersfeld, Berelson and Gaudett's (1940) study used surveys to investigate the effect of television on people's voting patterns. Bandura (1963) used laboratory experiments to discover the effects of television violence on children through the use of "Bobo Dolls", whilst Blumler and Katz (1974) used a combination of unstructured group discussions and surveys to examine reasons for watching television.

As we have seen, in the 1980's one of the most prominent studies was undertaken by Morley (1980). In his audience study of the programme 'Nationwide', Morley used a series of in-depth group interviews to examine different audiences' perceptions of television texts. Similarly, in the 1990's, other audience studies have used focus groups. An influential study by Katz and Liebes (1990) examined cross-cultural viewings of the successful television series 'Dallas'. In exploring the programme's reception by viewers from different cultures and ethnicities, this study discussed the programmes negotiation in 'nearly natural settings', that is, in the household. Schlesinger *et al.* (1992) used a combination of survey and focus group discussions to investigate women's perceptions of television violence. Drawing from various approaches, such as participant observation surveys and interviews, Gillespie (1995) used an ethnographic approach to study Punjabi teenagers' perceptions of their own culture in relation to representations of ethnicity in television.

For the purpose of this study, two approaches have been used. The first part of this study involved conducting a general review of the literature surrounding debates about national identity and television audiences, which set a conceptual backdrop for the study. An interview with an authority in Malaysia was also undertaken with the aim of providing additional information regarding the role of Malaysian television in articulating a sense of national identity.

The second part of the study is the focus of this chapter. It involved the use of an exploratory survey and a series of focus groups discussions. The exploratory survey was conducted with the aim of establishing background information on the young adults' viewing habits. Focus group sessions (the main method of collecting data) were then employed to gain an in-depth view of how participants from different ethnic backgrounds relate to television images, and how they perceive television images as contributing to their understanding of national identity.

Overall, this thesis is attempting to explore and clarify debates about what is national identity, both generally and in the context of Malaysia. Secondly, it is seeking to explore aspects of the way young adult Malaysians use and respond to television. Thirdly, it examines the perceptions of young adults in Malaysia about the way television represents national identity and, finally, to investigate the extent to which ethnicity influences perceptions of the representation of national identity.

This chapter includes a short review of the use of surveys, looking at the advantages and disadvantages of this method. It also includes a review of focus groups as a main source in collecting data, including a discussion of the nature of focus groups, and an explanation of why this is the appropriate technique to further the aims of this study. This latter section is divided into two parts. The first will review the use of focus groups as an important technique in data collection, and examines both good and bad practices in relation to focus

group investigations. The second looks at research design and practice, and includes the process of piloting and fully implementing the actual study.

5.1 An exploratory survey

Initial data collection for the study was made through survey questionnaires. It has to be noted here that the use of surveys in this study is to provide complementary data and background information about audience's television viewing habits. Hansen *et al.* (1998: 225) explain that surveys can provide empirical data regarding some aspects of the population, on a whole range of topics or issues, which can be used to support or to counter hypotheses or propositions. It can also be used simply to provide basic information on existing or changing patterns of behaviour.

Above all, this study is about finding out about different audience's perceptions and understandings of television images in shaping their sense of national identity. The use of surveys to provide basic information of viewing habit was seen as the most appropriate for this study. Thus, in order to gain basic information on the viewing patterns of young Malaysian adults, an exploratory survey of 120 respondents from the different ethnic backgrounds that make up Malaysian population was undertaken.

5.1.1 Advantages of surveys

Surveys offer some advantages. Firstly, surveys enable the researcher to collect a great deal of information at one time (Berger, 2000:191). Surveys can be distributed to a large number of respondents simultaneously. Secondly, surveys are relatively inexpensive in comparison to other methods of data collection because questionnaires can generate a large amount of information fairly economically. Thirdly, the data produced from surveys can be quantified and presented in numeric terms. Berger (2000: 191) has argued that data can be summarised in such a way that the reader is able to see more quickly what the data reveals about the subject of study.

5.1.2 Disadvantages of surveys

Whilst there are advantages in employing surveys, there are also shortfalls. Surveys have limited scope due to the fact that the questions are fixed, and there is no room to manoeuvre, such as during in-depth interviews. Therefore, the use of surveys can result in the respondents giving the wrong information because of a misinterpretation of the questions, especially when questions are unclear, ambiguous or even threatening (Berger, 2000: 193). Secondly, the nature of surveys depends heavily on asking simple questions that are answerable by most respondents. This means that more complex and detailed questions that could be asked using other techniques, such as interviews or in-group discussions (to probe further and clarify more complex questions), cannot be used. Thirdly, results from surveys only provide a quantitative or numeric description of some part of the population (Creswell, 1994: 117). This method thus provides general information about the subject under investigation and does not enable us to reveal more detailed data of the subject under investigation than is available by using interviews. Fourthly, surveys can also result in low response rates, because frequently only a small number of people answer and return questionnaires (Berger, 2000: 193).

Surveys thus have only a limited scope in asking certain types of questions. They tend to produce mainly numeric data which reveals general information about the subject under investigation. A more detailed method of data collection is needed to explore the complexity of media-audience relationships. This led the researcher to investigate the use of focus group discussions.

5.2 Focus groups

The focus group interview has been defined, by Rubin and Rubin (1995), as "...a form of natural process in which groups of people are assembled to discuss potential changes or shared impressions. The matters discussed can range from the general to the specific" (1995: 27). Focus groups involve gathering several people (participants) to talk about

certain issues introduced by the investigator, who then acts as a moderator to move the discussion forward. The participants selected for the discussion are those who might be consumers of a product, service, or viewers of a movie, etc. (1995: 139).

Hansen *et al.* (1998) have discussed the work of Merton (1987), who tracked the history of the focus group interview, starting in the early 1940's. Since then, there have been many famous studies about the relationship between the audience and the media. One study by Lazersfeld and Merton, from the Office of Radio Research in the University of Columbia, investigated the radio audience at the University of Columbia. Another research project conducted by Merton, which used the same method, was an investigation of a film audiences' response to army 'morale-boosting' training films undertaken for the Research Branch of the United States Army Information and Education Division (1998:258). Hansen *et al.* (1998) outlined the early use of focus group interviews in Social Sciences and discussed how this method later became widely used in commercial market research to find out about consumer behaviour, especially reactions towards new or improved products in the market.

However, in the last 20 years, the focus group survey method has also been used for media communication research concerning the effects of the media on audiences. Subsequently, in the 1980's and 1990's research into the relationship between audiences and the media turned away from traditional norms of examining the influence and effects of the media on audiences so as to emphasise on audience behaviour and belief. Specifically, researchers have sought to investigate how audiences interpret and make sense of, use, interact with, and create meaning from media content and technologies. One of the many methods involved in gathering such data has been focus group interviews, alongside participant observation and ethnographic methods. These approaches, to varying degrees, reject the traditional quantitative approach to the audience's relationship with the media (Hansen *et al.*, 1998: 259).

Focus groups have been used in work by Corner, Richardson and Fenton (1990:47) in their study of the nuclear energy issue. The study investigated how viewers made sense of, and evaluated, various issues, and how they 'saw' and 'heard' the series of programmes on nuclear energy that were chosen for analysis. Work by Schlesinger, *et al.* (1992:16) has investigated, through focus group interviews, audience interpretations of television violence against women, with the aim of finding out how both the violent and non-violent experiences of the women involved shaped their perceptions of violent images broadcast on television. Schlesinger *et al.* (1992: 23) chose 14 groups with a total of 91 women, with group sizes ranging between 5 and 9 people. As mentioned, Gillespie's (1995:1) study used focus groups to investigate the role of television content in shaping young Punjabi's (living in London) perceptions. Barker's (1997) work with focus groups explored how British Asian teenage viewers interpreted and made use of the Australian TV programme *'Neighbours'*. Finally, Kitzinger (1993), who studies audience interpretations of AIDS, used fifty-two groups comprising 351 participants in total, with group sizes ranging between 4 and 9.

5.2.1 The uses of focus groups

Morgan (1988) identified several indicators in finding out when it is appropriate to use a focus group. One of the easiest ways for the researcher to decide whether to use focus groups is to ask how actively and easily the participants would discuss the topic under investigation. At this stage, a pre-test or pilot study should be carried out to test the viability of the focus group method as a useful means of gathering data appropriate to the researcher's goal (1988:17).

Data collection using focus groups can be used at different stages of research. It can be used on its own as the sole means of gathering data or in combination with other methods. More specifically (Morgan 1997) suggested that focus groups can be used as follows:

a) *Exploratory purposes.*

Exploratory purposes are normally used at the beginning of the research. The purpose is to explore which issues and topics people are concerned about, and how they relate to the main research agenda. The results produced during this stage are normally used to help refine the research questions so to ensure that they are within the objective(s) of the survey questionnaires (Morgan,1988; Hansen, *et.al.*, 1998). For Hansen, the use of focus groups at this stage is:

> "...invaluable both in terms of providing pointers to relevant issues, themes and concerns, but much more specifically and crucially, in terms of ensuring that the survey questions deploy vocabularies and reference frames which resonate with those of the respondents who are to be surveyed".
>
> (Hansen et al.,1998:260).

b) Self- contained focus groups.

Morgan (1988) and Kruger (1994) assert that results from self-contained focus groups normally provide in-depth and detailed information about the participants' attitudes and opinions. Given the fact that self-contained focus groups produce rich and in-depth data, Morgan (1997: 18) further notes, that the important characteristics of self-contained focus group interviews is that the results can be said to stand on their own.

c) *Linking focus groups and participant observation.*

Morgan (1997) states that focus group interviews can be used in conjunction with participant observation to gain further information about the topic under investigation, before the researcher commences his or her fieldwork. The initial information gained at this stage will be very useful, especially for those researchers who are embarking upon

fieldwork for the first time, or for those who have had different experiences or are from a different cultural background to the informants in their fieldwork.

The use of focus group interviews at this stage can also help to establish a rapport between the researcher and the participants. Additionally, focus group interviews will help the researcher to choose the appropriate site for participant observation. The focus group interview is particularly useful when the researcher has multiple sites from which to choose. An interview can be conducted at each site before the researcher makes the final decision prior to embarking upon the fieldwork (Morgan 1997: 23-24).

d) Linking focus groups and surveys.

Focus group interviews can also be used to design questionnaires, as noted above. Morgan (1988) identified several ways that focus groups can be used in conjunction with a survey. Firstly, focus groups can be used to determine the domains that need to be measured in the survey. Secondly, they can be used to determine the dimensions that make up the domains. They can also be used to provide 'item wording' for survey respondents. Finally, they can be used in the preliminary work to establish hypotheses (Morgan, 1997: 25 - 27).

To this end, the focus group interview is an efficient means of generating survey questionnaires, because "...a relatively small number of groups can generate a large number of ideas about the categories of items that are needed to cover each questioning area" (Morgan 1997: 26). Not only can focus group interviews be used in the early stage of the study, but they can also be a resourceful means to collect qualitative data and combine this with a purely quantitative survey study.

There are several steps involved in conducting focus group sessions. It is not just a simple method but involves well-planned set of steps in order to achieve a successful interview. Hansen et al. (1998) identify eight steps involved in conducting a focus group session. These are outlined below and discussed in detail in the following sections.

a) Sampling and recruitment of groups:

Individuals who are invited to participate in the focus group are those who have been carefully identified so that they will contribute to the discussion and debate on the intended topic (Morgan, 1988, Hansen *et.al*, 1998). In addition, Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) assert that:

> " A focus group is not just a haphazard discussion among people who happen to be available; it is a well planned research endeavor that requires the same care and attention associated with any other type of scientific research" .
>
> (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990: 51).

Hansen *et al.* (1998) argued that the sampling of participants for focus group interviews must take into account the different characteristics of participants, namely in terms of their demography, education, occupation and any other elements expected to contribute to the differences (1998:265). However, they also note that when using focus group interviews, recruits are usually selected on the basis of specific criteria which are thought to be the most significant to the objective of the research. Normally, the recruitment of participants is drawn from independent elements from pre-existing groups of communities (1998: 265).

Several examples of the recruitment of groups used in previous studies using focus groups will now be discussed. Liebes and Katz (1990: 21-24) examined how audiences from different cultural backgrounds interpreted and became involved with the American television serial, *'Dallas'*. Their studies initially involved large groups consisting of various groups within the Israeli community, second generation Americans in Los Angeles, as well communities in Japan. The study had sixty-six groups, mainly consisting of six people of the same ethnicity, age and educational background.

Kitzinger (1993) in her studies on how social interaction mediates audience understandings, drew on participants already known to each other from pre-existing groups

rather than isolated individuals. Similarly, Corner and his colleagues (1990: 48-49) also chose their participants from pre-existing groups in the community. Their studies focussed on the main political parties that had an interest in nuclear energy. Groups involved in their studies were from local *Labour, Conservative* and *SLD* parties, local *Rotary Clubs*, *Labour and Trade Union Resource Centres* for unemployed people, a women's group, comprehensive school pupils, medical students, members of *Friends of the Earth* and workers groups at the *Heysham* nuclear power plant. Philo (1990, 23) in his study of media coverage and public beliefs relating to the British miners strike of 1984 to 1985, divided the groups into four main categories, namely groups with special knowledge or experience of the strike (i.e. miners, police), occupational groups, special interest groups and four residential groups.

Burges and Harrison (1993) used focus groups together with survey methods to collect data. Their studies on the role of the media in relation to controversial environmental issues, concentrated on two groups of local people, those who supported the development, and members of the nature conservancy and environmental organisations. The groups under investigation were interviewed six times in six months. Schlesinger *et. al* (1992), in their study investigating how gender (as well as ethnicity, nationality and class background) structured how violence is viewed on television, paid particular attention to members of the focus groups' personal experiences of violence.

b) Numbers of groups and participants:

Morgan (1988) and Kruger (1994), suggest that when deciding on the number of groups and participants in the focus groups, no specific number(s) should be borne in mind. Instead, choice should be driven by the objective of the research and resources available. When considering the number of groups and number of participants, various audience characteristics, such as class, gender, interest group, occupation, education, ethnicity and

other elements, can also be used to determine number of groups and participants in the focus group interviews. Hansen *et al.* (1998) note that if the focus group interview is for exploratory use, to develop an initial idea, the number of groups should probably be not more than four groups, however. If the use of focus group interviews is the main tool for collecting data then it is suggested that at least six groups be used (1998: 268).

Morgan (1988: 42), drawing on work by Zeller (1993), Calder (1977) and Glaser (1967), suggested using a saturated technique to determine the number of groups for focus group interviews. The technique is to run several different groups to see whether the additional group contributes to new data. If the next group has not added any new data, then the researcher should stop at the last group that provided the same data. However, if the new group adds new ideas, then the researcher should continue to add to the number of groups until the next one does not contribute any new data. Several researchers in media studies have used the technique suggested by Morgan to determine the number of groups for their focus group interviews. Livingstone and Lunt (1993), in their study of audience interpretations of television talk show programmes, ended up with 69 participants in groups between 4 and 8 people.

c) Arranging participants:

One vital aspect, after the process of identifying participants for focus group interviews is the arrangement of participants. It is important for the researcher to provide participants with detailed information about the focus group interview that they are going to attend. A letter of invitation should contain information about the purpose of the focus group, topic, duration, place, date, location, and map of the location. These are seen as essential to avoid confusing participants.

Additionally, an incentive offer (possibly in terms of money) or other inducements, such as childcare, and, or, refreshments can also be shown in the invitation letter. (Schlesinger *et*

al.,1992; Kruger,1994; Hansen *et al.*, 1998). For an example, Schlesinger *et al.* (1992:26) paid participants' £20 for one-day sessions. Other expenses covering travel, lunch and child-care were also provided during the sessions. In addition to information about the focus group interviews, it is also important to send written confirmation to participants as a reminder a day before the actual sessions. (Schlesinger *et al.*, 1992; Kruger, 1994; Hansen *et al.*, 1998).

d) Interview setting and location:

The choice of location for the focus group interviews will be based on the purpose of the research, its convenience and or practicality for participants to attend. The place of interview can be in a formal setting, such as a university, hotel, conference room or the most homely of settings, the resident's own place of abode. Different researchers have used various kinds of settings for their focus group interviews. In many cases, people feel more comfortable to attend focus group sessions taking place in a familiar venue rather than having to travel to the unfamiliar place (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999: 11). For an example Morley (1988: 33) chose the private homes of people in his investigation of domestic/family television viewing. In contrast, Schlesinger *et al.* (1992: 26) conducted most of their focus group interviews in a university setting, as they considered the domestic setting would not be suitable for the purpose of their study, which was concerning 'domestic violence towards women'.

e) The moderator's roles:

A moderator is the person who facilitates, moderates, stimulates and guides the focus groups interviews. Hansen *et al.* (1998:272-273) identify several roles for the moderator, as follows:

i) to ensure the issues, topics and foci outlined in the interview guide are covered during the discussions, and ensure adequate time is spent;

ii) to ensure the contribution of all participants in the discussions, and make sure that no participants dominate the discussions;

iii) to ensure that the discussion is focussed on the issues, and not allow the discussions to drift to subjects irrelevant to the issues under investigation;

The moderator's role depends largely on the subject under analysis, the types of respondents and the nature of the participation. Some of these elements may vary the level of the moderator's involvement in the discussions. For a 'passive' group, the moderator will have to be more actively involved so as to stimulate the discussions. However, the moderator must not dominate and lead the discussions. In most cases, the moderator is the researcher. The benefit of this is that the moderator is already familiar with the research topic, its aims and objectives. As regards the non-researcher moderator, they should be briefed about the topic, its aims and objectives and become familiar with the project that they are dealing with (Hansen *et al.*, 1998: 272).

In certain research projects, the moderator's characteristics and background such as age, gender, race and ethnicity have to be taken into consideration when guiding the discussion. These elements can influence participants' responses on sensitive issues, such as violence against women, discrimination against the black community, etc., and therefore they have to be taken into account (Hansen *et al.*, 1998: 272). Significantly, 'prior knowledge' of the moderator, such as the capability to 'pick up on' and interpret language, terminology, gesture and cultural meaning of the focus group sessions is also important (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999: 13).

f) The interview guide:

Focus groups, as a qualitative method, are often an appropriate approach to encourage participants to present their views openly on certain issues. This does not mean, however, that participants are free to talk about anything that has little or no relevance to the issue

under investigation. An interview guide is needed which provides a systematic method for conducting a focus group interview.

The interview guide is the 'menu' for the focus group interview (Lindlof,1995:185; Hansen et al. 1998: 274). It should guide discussions on what is going to be asked, and in addition, what kind of tools if any, should be included (e.g. visual aids) to facilitate discussions. Generally, questions in focus group interviews begin with general issues moving on to matters that are more specific (Kruger, 1995: 54-62; see explanation below). The guide provides participants with some idea of what issues are going to be discussed. It also encourages participants to feel comfortable in the discussions. A sequence normally followed in media audience research using focus group interviews is detailed below:

> "... first, exposure to selected media material (a television program, a film, selected newspaper coverage and so on), followed by a second, undirected general discussion moving gradually, under the moderator's direction, towards more specific foci, issues, topics, and questions".
>
> (Hansen *et al.,* 1998: 275).

Schlesinger *et al* (1992) in their study aimed at finding out women's interpretations of, and responses to, the portrayal of violence against women on television, began the focus group discussions by asking the participants to fill-in a background information form prior to their arrival. This was followed, in turn, by the participants screening programmes chosen for the discussions. They were then asked to complete short questionnaires, and were then asked more specific questions about the programmes (1992: 26-30).

g) Recording the data:

Focus group interviews, as a qualitative method, produce a huge amount of data derived from participants' opinions, statements, arguments, individual interactions and also

physical reactions, such as body language, gestures and facial expressions. One of the ways to capture the data produced in focus group interviews is to record all the data on audiotapes. Audio-video recording can also be used. This also captures physical reactions, but is more complicated (e.g. in terms of lighting) and sometimes can be too intrusive. For the researcher to be able to record all the discussions in the focus group interviews, participants must be made aware of the use of the audiocassette recorder (Kruger, 1994:112; Lindlof, 1995:193).

Participants also need to be assured of confidentiality and anonymity. In cases where the researcher needs to capture the physical reactions of the focus group interviews without the 'presence' of a video recorder, a research assistant (as an additional observer) can be used to jot down notes on participants' physical reactions. Most important in focus group interviews, however, is the need "to capture the way participants naturally talk about, make sense of, reason about, and generate meanings of specific issues, topics and phenomena" (Hansen *et al.*, 1998: 281).

h) Analysing and reporting focus group discussions:

The final step in the focus group interview is to analyse and report the results. As noted earlier, focus group interviews produce a huge amount of data and the process of analysing and deciding what to include and what to exclude is not easy. However, there are several ways in which this process can be undertaken. Kruger (1994) and Hansen *et al.* (1998) suggest that listening to the tape can be one way of analysing the data. Additionally, transcribing the data is another way of undertaking analysis; this is a preferred method when analysing the data of many focus group interviews.

According to Rubin and Rubin (1995: 227-229) and Hansen *et al.* (1998: 279-281), when beginning to analyse data from focus group interviews, it is useful to develop a scheme for categorising and labelling the responses, statements and arguments. This can be developed

through a 'microanalysis' process, that is, a detailed line-by-line analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 1996: 57). Thus, categories for the analysis can be derived from the headings used in the interview guide, or a modified version of this, derived from the focus group discussions (Hansen *et al.*1998: 279-280). To establish the categories for coding the data, the researcher has to be very familiar with the data (Lindlof, 1995: 219). This means that they will have to read the data several times in order to identify the categories, or in the words of Hansen *et al.*, to "soak oneself in the material" (1998: 280).

Above all, the most important is to keep in mind while reporting the results of the focus group interview is to relate the data to the research problems, and the aims and objectives of the whole research project (Kruger,1994; Lindlof,1995; Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Corbin and Strauss, 1996 and Hansen *et al.*, 1998).

5.2.2 Designing questions for focus groups

Kruger (1994) suggests several types of questions are involved in focus group discussions. Question design for a focus group sessions, range from the general to the specific (1994: 54-62). Different types of questions are detailed below:

a) Opening questions:

The first questions, normally asked at the very beginning of the focus group interview, are called opening questions. These types of questions act as an icebreaker between the moderator and participants. One common example of this type of question requests that participants introduce themselves (i.e. their names, occupations, hobbies etc). This again depends on the main objective of the focus group discussions.

b) Introductory questions:

This type of question is designed to introduce participants to the topic under investigation. The questions asked do not normally invite criticism and are intended to facilitate conversation among the participants about the topic.

c) Transition questions:

As the name suggests, these questions help to direct the conversation towards questions that are central to the whole discussion. These questions also help participants to link between the introductory and the key questions.

d) Key questions

The key questions are the most important questions in the focus group discussions. Most key questions require detailed answers. These are at the heart of the focus group discussions and provide the majority of the data used in analysis. More time should be spent developing and also analysing these questions.

e) Ending questions:

These questions end the discussions. They help participants to reflect on the entire discussion. Kruger (1994) indicated that there are various types of ending questions, for example:

i) All things considered

At this point, participants are required to state their overall opinions after going through the process of the discussion. It also allows participants to identify which aspects are the most important and to clarify their positions.

ii) Summary questions

The moderator or his or her assistant will normally provide a brief summary of the key answers, and any other points that have emerged during the group discussions. After this, participants will be asked whether they think the summary is adequate.

iii) Final questions:

These questions ensure that the discussion has been logical and is now completed. To ask these questions, the moderator has to make sure that there is sufficient time for the group to draw their conclusions. It is advisable to have at least 10 minutes remaining before the end of the session to do this.

5.2.3 Reliability and validity

Reliability is normally considered high if at least two researchers employ the same method to study the same subject and produce similar results. Lindlof (1995) and Rubin and Rubin (1995) define reliability as consistency of result, in which research instruments testing the same subject in the same way will produce the same results over a number of times.

Validity normally deals with the findings and whether or not they are related to the research aims and objectives. Kruger (1994: 31) defined validity as "the degree to which the procedure really measures what it proposes to measure". Lindlof (1995) and Rubin and Rubin (1995) define validity as confirmation of the truth of the observations. In this respect, concentration is given to whether or not the research instrument can actually reflect the subject studied. Rubin and Rubin (1995) argued that the use of the words 'reliable' and 'valid' only occurs in quantitative study. They stated that most indicators of reliability and validity do not take place in a qualitative research. They suggested that in order to judge the credibility of qualitative work, one must be able to look at the 'transparency' and 'communicability' of the data (Rubin, 1995: 85-86).

Rubin and Rubin (1995) introduced a number of aspects to determine the validity and reliability of the focus group method, including' transparency', 'consistency-coherency' and 'communicability' (1995:85-86). 'Transparency', as both researchers defined it, is the ability for other readers to understand the basic process of data collection. A transparent report allows readers to assess the researcher's intellectual strengths, weaknesses, biases and conscientiousness. Data collected in focus group sessions can be most appropriately transformed into a written account. This keeps detailed records of the data collected that is useful for researchers to reconstruct the process of decision-making in reporting focus group results (1995: 86-87).

'Consistency' refers to the parallel process of analysing the data, which involves the process of identifying, how the same theme is discussed within the same group, as well as across the groups. The process of consistency in analysing focus group data did not only take into consideration what was being mentioned by most participants in the groups, but also acknowledged the different views, which might only have been represented by one response. In this sense, consistency will allow researchers to explore why and in what circumstances, participants can hold different views (Rubin and Rubin 1995: 87).

'Communicability' of the data in this sense persuades participants and readers of the genuineness of the research project. The richness of the detail, as well as the evidence and depth of the text, helps to convince people. A detailed explanation and thorough documentation of how the researcher conducts and experiences the whole process of focus group sessions also provides legitimacy to the focus groups (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 89).

The nature of the focus group discussion process requires group interaction. Questions may be raised, however, as to whether or not the results are artificially developed by the interactions of group participants, or are actually the points of view of individuals. Those who are sceptical of the results produced by focus group discussions may claim that people sometimes give answers that suit the situation and that the moderators can sometimes

unconsciously influence group discussions. Those who are conscientious about measurement make an effort to ensure that they are measuring what they are supposed to measure. They specifically develop so-called 'scientific' steps in order to obtain 'scientific data' (Rubin and Rubin 1995: 86). Given the subjective nature of focus group results, however, this then raises the question as to whether the focus group result is actually reliable and valid. Researchers find it painful at times to demonstrate it, but as Kruger (1994) put it:

> "Focus groups are valid if they are used carefully for a problem that is suitable for focus group inquiry (...) focus group are very much like other social sciences measurement procedures in which validity depends not only on the procedures used but also on context"
>
> (Kruger 1994: 31).

For Kruger (1994), and Kitzinger and Barbour (1999), the focus group result has a high validity in that it gives participants an opportunity to 'open up' during the sessions. In addition, Kruger (1994) asserts that the insights produced in this way may not be available from other sources of data collection, such as survey questionnaires, observations, individual interviews, etc., which do not retain the uniqueness and credibility of the focus group method (1994: 32).

5.2.4 Advantages of focus groups

Focus group discussions were a common method in the 1980s for studying the relationships between media and audiences, and as mentioned earlier have several advantages. People are social creatures who interact with each other and focus groups use this fact to advantage. Kruger (1994), Lindlof (1995), Hansen *et al.* (1998) and Kitzinger and Barbour (1999) have stated that focus group discussions offer interaction among participants through dynamic social discourse. Participants are stimulated by other

members' views to articulate their own perspectives. Morgan and Spanish (1984) further conclude:

> "The strength of focus groups comes from a compromise between the strengths found in other qualitative methods. Like participant observation, it allows access to a process that qualitative researchers are often centrally interested in: interaction. Like in depth interviewing, they allow access to the content that we are often interested in: the attitudes and experiences of our informants. As a compromise, focus groups are neither as strong as participant observation or the naturalistic observation of interaction, nor as strong as interviewing or the direct probing of an informant's knowledge, but they do a better job of combining these two goals than either of the other two techniques. We believe this is a useful combination, and one, which for some types of research questions, may represent the best of both worlds".
>
> (Morgan and Spanish 1984: 35).

A second advantage is the ability of the moderator to probe, mainly in order to gain clarification and detailed information about the subject commented on by participants. The kind of advantage mentioned here does not occur in other situations, such as participant observation and postal survey questions (Kruger 1994: 35). A third advantage of the focus group is that it is 'focussed'; it has the ability to produce a concrete amount of data on precisely the topic of interest. Other methods allow the researcher to catch only the general sense, rather than the specific sense offered in focus groups (Morgan 1988 Morrison, 1998, and Kitzinger and Barbour 1999). The fourth advantage of focus groups is that they allow participants to talk through issues themselves (i.e freedom of expression), unlike surveys, which only allowed participants to speak through the researcher (Morrison, 1998: 172). The fifth advantage Kruger (1994) states is that results are presented in 'lay

terminology'- simple manner, that is, with quotations from group participants rather than in a complicated statistical chart.

5.2.5 Disadvantages of focus groups

Like all other techniques for gathering data, focus groups also have limitations. Several limitations of this technique are given below.

A first disadvantage of the focus group discussion is that the researcher has less control over the group compared to individual interviews. As mentioned earlier, the focus group allows interactions among participants, which may sometimes channel the discussion to irrelevant issues. The moderator is therefore required to keep the discussion focused in order to gain useful data (Kruger, 1994:36). Secondly, the massive amount of data produced by group interactions is difficult to analyse. Furthermore, group interactions produce subjective data as opposed to more objective data obtained from the quantitative method. Decisions as to which data to include and which to exclude can be difficult, frustrating and perplexing. In addition, careful consideration needs to be given in interpreting data within its context (Kruger, 1994: 36).

Thirdly, the focus group benefits from a trained interviewer or moderator. Kruger (1994) argued that although unskilled interviewers or moderators can achieve a remarkable result, it is far better if skilled interviewers or moderators are used. He further added that focus groups require certain skills to manoeuvre the groups to know when to probe, pause and to keep the discussion within the intended issues. Fourthly, it is likely to be difficult to assemble the group together. The focus group requires a number of people to participate at a specifically given time and place, and trying to get each and every one to attend the session can be a big problem, even though an incentive may be offered to overcome this. Furthermore, because focus groups take place in a group setting, with most individual

strangers to each other, there may be certain restraints in attitude and manner in divulging information to other group members about personal issues (1994: 36).

As stated earlier, focus groups have been used for more than 50 years in many studies. Researchers have provided copious advice as to the best way to design and apply such a method. In the latter part of the methodology chapter, I will detail how the research design for my project was finalised and how the literature review on focus groups has helped to support my research design.

5.3 Research design and process.

The research design involved planning, piloting, implementing and analysing the data. In this section, I will outline the process involved in conducting focus group discussions for this study. The research design involved here was conducted in two stages. The first stage was the pilot study, and the second stage involved the actual study.

The pilot study comprised two levels: piloting the exploratory survey, and the focus group sessions. It has to be noted that the main 'tool' for collecting the data in this study was the use of focus group sessions, while the survey served to establish background information on the participants' viewing habits.

5.3.1 Pilot study for exploratory survey

After obtaining permission from the authorities, the pilot study was conducted in Malaysia. Data for the pilot study were collected from a selection of university students. An exploratory survey at the pilot stage was distributed to 50 respondents at both the University Sains Malaysia (USM) (25 respondents) and the University Malaya (UM) (25 respondents). The respondents were from different ethnic backgrounds, ages, gender and States and course of study. The aim of this initial study was to establish the respondents viewing habits.

5.3.2 Pilot study for focus groups sessions

The second level of the pilot study involved collecting in-depth data through focus group discussions on how young adults from different ethnic backgrounds relate to television images in constructing or deconstructing their national identity. The main objective in conducting a pilot study was to test the 'practicality' of the focus group method as a useful means of collecting data to fulfil the whole aim of the study. Morgan (1998: 17) suggests that pilot work is important, and is one of the ways of finding out how actively and easily participants will discuss the topic under investigation. This also suggests that the use of focus group discussions will contribute valuable data.

The purpose of the pilot study was, firstly, to gauge initial reactions to the design of the focus group discussions and, secondly, to explore the related problems and frame the scope of the actual study. It served also to provide the researcher with an opportunity to improve the research tools and techniques used, as well as to identify any possible problems so that the actual study could be undertaken with minimum difficulty.

Data for the pilot study were collected from a selection of university students made on the basis of several criteria. These included the students' different demographic and social backgrounds, such as ethnic background, their age, gender, State, course of study, place of study (university attended) and exposure to television channels (terrestrial and satellite television). For further details about the conduct and results of pilot study, see Appendix 1.

5.4 Actual study

The nature of the actual study was based not only on the results and experiences obtained at the pilot study stage, but also on other factors, such as acquiring permission from the authorities and gaining access to the students, as well as the tools (equipment) involved in implementing the study. All of these factors had a major influence in shaping the whole process, not to mention financial and time constraints. Having carefully considered the

viability of implementing the actual study, the work was finally conducted in both USM and UM. The rationale for the decision will be discussed next.

5.4.1 Site for the fieldwork

The actual study took place at the USM in Penang and UM in Kuala Lumpur. It has to be noted that survey research was conducted at both universities, while focus groups sessions alone were conducted at the USM.

It was my intention to conduct the survey and the focus group discussions at three of the Malaysian universities, namely USM situated in the north, UM in the middle and UTM (the University of Technology of Malaysia) situated in the south of Peninsular Malaysia. However, permission from the authorities, arranging tutorial rooms, accessibility and the willingness of the participants to take part, constraints on time for travelling, and limited resources proved to be major obstacles in conducting the fieldwork. Morgan (1988) noted that the suitability of any particular research method not only relies solely on its effectiveness in collecting data for the research questions but also on reaching particular populations (see also Barbour and Kitzinger,1999:62). This suggests that gaining access to the particular participants is a crucial factor.

Given that all universities in Malaysia are diverse in the nature of their student composition (i.e. they include a multi-ethnic population), the reasons for defining the limits of the sites of the fieldwork were justified. It should be noted here that another university in the East of Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak, was not taken into consideration due to travelling expenses (involving flights).

The decision on where to conduct the focus groups sessions was very much influenced by the factors mentioned above. Most importantly factor that influenced the conducting of focus groups sessions at USM was also related to the findings of the pilot study. Specifically, this study suggested that the place of study did not influence participants'

views about television programmes, or their understanding of the role of television images in constructing or deconstructing national identity.

5.5 Exploratory survey research process

Having considered all of these factors, exploratory survey research was conducted at both the UM and USM, while the focus groups sessions were conducted at the USM. A short survey was employed, aimed at establishing background information on the students' viewing habits. Conducting survey research was less complicated in the sense that it did not involve the complicated logistics required for the focus group sessions, which involved all the various constraints mentioned above.

All of the 120 survey forms were distributed to the students at both USM and UM (see Appendix 2). 60 students from the different ethnic backgrounds, namely Malay, Chinese, Indian, Punjabi and the ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak, with 10 respondents, five male and five female, representing each ethnic background, were chosen from the two universities. All completed forms were collected and returned to me.

The survey questionnaires were used to provide complementary data for this study. They produced 'skeleton' information about students' television viewing habits. Other aspects, such as how they talked about it, and what they really thought about television images, were inaccessible by this method. Therefore, the more in-depth data were collected through several focus group sessions.

5.5.1 Focus group process and design

The focus group process and design involved several aspects, namely: recruitment of the participants, determining the number of groups and group composition, arranging participants, securing a location, deciding on the moderator's role, preparing interview guide and the use of tools, visual aids and data analysis. It is noted here that for the purposes of this study, the researcher intended to focus on getting in-depth data, on how participants from the different ethnic backgrounds talked, understood, and negotiated

television images in articulating their sense of a national identity. As mentioned earlier, the use of focus group sessions was the most appropriate method for collecting such in-depth data.

a) Recruitment:

From the pilot project I had learnt that the recruitment of the participating students for the focus groups would be more efficient with the help of a student research assistant rather than myself alone. The same procedure was employed for recruiting participants for the discussion groups in the actual study as I had used for the pilot project. Research assistants were also employed for the distribution of 'background forms' (see Appendix 3) and to continue with the recruitment.

A meeting was set up with the research assistants where they were briefed about the purposes of the research, the criteria for the recruitment of each group, the number of groups and group composition, and the kind of practices they could use to approach potential participants, as groups or individuals. The first stage of the recruitment was to find out the extent to which university students were involved in television viewing: that is, did they watch television? When was the last time they watched television?, and the number of hours they spent watching television.

This was considered as one of the crucial factors in group formation, since the generalisation that all students watched television was proven in the pilot study to be flawed. Specifically, one participant in the pilot project had already indicated that they did not watch television, but preferred to watch DVD, and some said they had 'distanced' themselves from television. This means they only watched television when they had the opportunity. Some students who stayed in the hostel only had access to the television in the university TV lounge, which meant that they had to share their watching time with other students in the hostel. Therefore, simply asking students to come for the sessions

without taking into account their 'watching activities' would not contribute to collecting the data for the study.

After identifying whether they were involved in watching television, they were asked whether they were interested in taking part in the focus group discussions. If they indicated their willingness to participate, they were then asked to fill in the rest of the background form. Recruitment for participants for focus group discussions was based on several criteria, which were:

i) Students availability to attend the sessions:

Those who had indicated both an interest and ability to attend the sessions were given priority when choosing the participants.

ii) Number of hours spent watching television:

Those who had stated that they watched more than two hours per day were selected. This was because I had learnt from my pilot project that simply asking students to attend discussions, without taking into account whether or not they watched television, and the numbers of hours they spent watching television, was inadequate. For example, some participants from the pilot group study indicated that they could not engage in discussions because they had not watched television for a year. One student stated: "I have not watched television for a year because most of the programmes are boring and I prefer to watch DVD or surf the internet."

iii) Ethnic background:

Above all, group recruitment was based on the ethnic background of the participants. This factor was influenced by the results of the pilot study, where there was an indication that differences in ethnic background would tend to lead to different views and ideas in the discussions.

After identifying the potential students for particular groups, and the times for the discussions, they were then contacted and meetings were set up. After agreement was reached on the time slot allocated for each session, they were given the invitation letter, with the details of the 'Research Project' (see Appendix 4), which included the scope of the discussions, and place and time for them to be conducted. Details of the composition of the group will be discussed next.

b) Number of groups and groups composition:

When deciding the number of groups, I used the 'saturated information technique' as suggested by Morgan (1988). His technique suggests that the researcher should run several groups until the next group showed no contribution of new data for the focus group interviews. If the next group has not contributed any new data, the researcher should stop at the last group that provided the same data.

This method had been tested during my pilot study, during which I had run three focus group interviews with the Malay Group, Groups (3), (5) and (7). The results showed that after my second focus group, the next group had not contributed or added any new data. Therefore, I decided to stop at the second group. No group recruited after the second one provided any new information or data on the topic; therefore, I decided to run two groups for my actual study.

A total number of 59 participants contributed to the focus group sessions. Typically the group size for my study was between 4 and 7 people. Ideally, it should have been between 4 and 8, but some of the participants failed to attend the sessions.

Barbour and Kitzinger (1999:7) assert that, in general, focus group research does not aim at statistical 'representatives', but rather is guided by the particular research questions in determining group composition. In this study, whilst recognising the importance of answering the research questions of the study, the decision on the number of participants was also determined by practicalities.

In the groups of homogeneous ethnic background, the group's size was between 4 and 6 and the groups with different ethnic backgrounds contained between 6 and 7. The reason for this was because a small number of participants in a group allowed for the collection of detailed answers from individuals by giving each participant the chance to interact and express their views as fully as possible. A larger number of participants in a group could create problems of control over the group, especially if the sessions involved talkative participants. Based on the pilot work, ethnicity was the major influence found in responses to the focus group questions. Barbour and Kitzinger (1999: 62) pointed that it is important to clarify the most crucial factor that is most likely to answer what we want to know. Therefore, since the main aim of the study was to see how participants from different ethnic backgrounds perceived the role of television in articulating national identity, ethnicity was taken as a central criterion for group composition.

Groups were formed based on 'uniform' ethnic backgrounds, such as all Malay participants, or all Chinese participants, and so forth. Similarly, groups were formed of different or 'mixed' ethnic backgrounds, such as groups consisting of Malays, Chinese, Indians, Punjabis, or minorities from Sabah and Sarawak. Each ethnic background was represented by two groups. I divided the groups into twelve, which were:

a) Malay- two groups,

b) Chinese – two groups

c) Indian - two groups

d) Punjabi - two groups

e) Minorities from Sabah and Sarawak - two groups

f) Mixed groups - two groups

Details of the composition of the groups are available in appendix 5. However, all the names used in this project have been changed to conceal the participants' identities.

c) Arrangements for the participants:

Making the arrangements for participants to attend focus group discussions proved a difficult task. Many considerations had to be taken into account so as to ensure that all of the participants attended the sessions. The main task was to check the availability of the participants so that the arranged sessions did not clash with their individual timetables.

For this purpose, the 'identified' participants were contacted through an invitation letter sent personally either by the research assistants or myself. Participants representing each group were then invited to a meeting to confirm time slots to attend focus group sessions. During the meeting participants were briefed about the purpose of the study, topic, duration of the session, place, date, incentive offered and map of the location.

On the day that 'identified groups' were due for the sessions, research assistants were assigned to meet them and bring them to the discussion site to ensure that all of the participants arrived together and at the same time for the discussions. In the event that participants dropped out at the last minute, if the groups were still of four or more participants, the session went ahead. In most cases, the groups that came to the discussions ranged from four to seven people.

d) Location:

As mentioned earlier, the site for the fieldwork was the university. For the focus group sessions the tutorial room was chosen as the most appropriate for conducting the sessions. The decision on the chosen place was based on practicality and accessibility of equipment needed during the sessions. Furthermore, factors such as 'convenience' for the student to attend the sessions was also taken into consideration. The tutorial room, in my opinion, also provided participants with a 'natural setting', which suited their student lifestyle and put participants at ease to express their views, ideas and feelings.

e) The moderator's role:

The moderator is an important person to facilitate the discussions. All of the focus groups in this study were moderated by myself. Coming from a Malay ethnic background, I was aware that working with participants from ethnic backgrounds different to mine may be a very important issue for them, especially when questions involved comments about ethnicity, particularly for the Malays. Some participants were found to be self-conscious in commenting on questions related to ethnicity. Assurance was given that all kinds of responses would be respected and treated confidentially, and participants were encouraged not to perceive myself as representing any particular ethnic group.

Similarly, it was found that in most cases participants were very sensitive when responding to issues relating to 'politics'. They appeared uneasy in expressing critical views on the subject. Some of them sought reconfirmation that their identities would be kept anonymous. To overcome this problem I had to reassure participants that all the discussions were highly confidential and that their identities would be concealed. Additionally, all the participants were informed that they should feel free to express their views in whatever ways they felt most comfortable with. In the event that they felt that they did not want to respond to any particularly 'sensitive issues' they could choose not to do so.

The sessions were conducted in both Malay and English. In some cases a mixture of both languages was used to conduct the sessions. Malay is the official language and English is the second language in Malaysia.

f) Question guide:

In conducting the sessions, I used a set of structured questions to guide the discussions. A question guide or interviewer's guide, as Hansen *et al.* (1998) and Lindlof (1995) point out, is a 'menu' for the focus group. It contains guidelines on what the whole session should be about, including what points need to be addressed and what kind of tools, if any,

need to be included (see Appendix 6 for the focus group questions).

Question guides prepared for my focus group sessions moved from the 'general to the specific', following categories outlined by Kruger (1994:54-62) and discussed above. It began with an 'opening question' and gradually moved to the 'key' questions. The reason for this was to provide the participants with some idea of the issues to be discussed. The sessions started with a welcome speech to all of the participants, thanking them for coming to the sessions and introducing myself, as well as giving some brief information about the sessions. A sample of the opening speech is as follows:

> Moderator: "I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you for coming to the session today. My name is Juliana Abdul Wahab, a research student from the University of Glamorgan in Wales, U.K. Today we will be talking about television in Malaysia and its implications for young adults' perceptions of national identity. Basically, what we will be doing today will involve discussions about some aspects of television and the 'sense of belonging' to Malaysia. I must stress here that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions; please feel free to express your views. Most importantly, all the responses in these discussions will be treated as confidential, and participants' identities will be anonymous. All names will be changed and the data produced in this study will be solely my responsibility".

Participants were informed about the use of tape-recorders to ensure that no responses would be missed, which also indicated to them the importance of their views. I also explained about the use of visual aids to stimulate the discussions at a later stage in the sessions (the use of visual aids will be discussed later). The first questions asked during the sessions involved participants introducing themselves (i.e. their name, age, course, year of study and State, see Appendix 6). These questions were used to break the ice, to establish a rapport and to make everyone feel comfortable during the sessions. Next, we

moved on to the introductory questions to introduce participants to the research topic and to get them to talk about self-identification and their sense of belonging to Malaysia (Qs.2, 3 and 4). We then moved to the transition question (Q.5), which directed the discussions towards the key questions and also helped participants to make the connection between the introductory and key questions. At this stage, participants were invited to talk generally about television in Malaysia.

Next, key questions central to the study were asked. Participants were invited to talk more specifically about television images and how they related to their sense of belonging (Qs, 6,7, 8, 9,10,11). Finally, to bring the discussions to an end, they were asked to briefly summarise all the discussions (Q 12 and Q.13). They were then invited to comment on the sessions (Q.14). Thanking all the participants for their valuable contributions ended the sessions.

In addition to the use of the set questions during the focus group sessions, probing was also necessary. This was especially so when participants wanted to clarify their points or the researcher required more in-depth responses.

g) Visual aids:

One of the 'tools' used in conducting focus group interviews was the use of video clips. Short clips, showing a variety of television programmes, were used. The use of short clips in the focus group sessions was not central for the discussions, but was purely for stimulating debate. Participants were told about the use of the short clips to help 'refresh ' their memories and further promote the discussions. This involved viewing a selection of short clips of both local and imported television programmes in a range of genres, including news, sport, drama, sitcoms, advertisements, TV magazines and music and cookery programmes (lasting between 6-8 minutes in total). The selection of local programmes used in the short clips was based on interviews with the management of Radio and Television Malaysia (RTM) in Kuala Lumpur and a short survey of the public

(including school children (5), university Students (5), working professionals (5) and parents in Penang (5). The reason for conducting this short survey was to determine a general idea of what might be considered to be programmes that promoted a sense of Malaysian National identity. Also at issue was how the general public understands these ideas. This was done in order to provide the researcher with a general picture as to the kind of programmes to select for the focus group sessions.

Officials interviewed at the Ministry of Information were asked to identify the sort of programmes they considered to be effective in portraying 'Malaysian national identity'. The interviewees, who wished their identity to remain anonymous, identified three major characteristics of what they considered to be programmes that portrayed Malaysian identity on television. Firstly, the portrayal of multi-ethnic characters on Malaysian television such as images of the Malays, Chinese, Indians, Punjabis and other ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak in local television programmes (such as drama, sitcoms, advertisements and musical programmes). Secondly, the portrayal of persons of authority was mentioned, such as the Prime Minister, Yang Di Pertuan Agong (His Royal Highness the King) and the Sultan, especially on local news. Thirdly, was the use of the Malay language on Malaysian television. They emphasised the importance of the Malay language and pointed out that all local or imported programmes in any language other than Malay were dubbed or subtitled in the Malay language.

As previously mentioned, the selection of video clips was also based on a short survey of the opinions of 20 people regarding the programmes they considered to be effective in portraying 'Malaysian identity'. The results showed very similar answers.

Thus, the information, as detailed above, provided the basis for the selection of the video clips used in the discussions on national identity in relation to programmes on Malaysian television. The selection of imported programmes that were also used in the short clips included a variety of television genres (i.e., excerpts from a sitcom, movie and

documentary), mainly from the U.S.A, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia and the U.K. These clips were used mainly to highlight a variety of genres from different sources, which is the nature of the kind of imported programmes available in Malaysia.

h) Tools used:

To collect all of the data produced during the interview sessions, I used a high quality 'sensor-surrounds' microphone and a tape recorder. The microphone was placed in the middle of the semi-circle formed during the focus group interviews. All of the participants were made aware of the use of the microphone and tape recorder to collect the data at the beginning of the sessions, and also were assured of their anonymity. The voice projection of each participant and myself was tested before the sessions started to ensure quality recording. A television and video recorder were also used to play back the short video clips. Brief comments to capture the mood of the group were also made, however these were minimal, as in the researcher's view it would have been 'intrusive' and would not have helped in establishing good rapport which was an important element in the focus groups sessions.

5.6 Data analysis

Having accomplished the fieldwork for the actual study, three types of data were collected from the exploratory survey, the background information and the focus group discussions. It must be remembered here that the survey and focus groups were not meant to examine in any significance the different demography or social criteria such as age, gender or class of the participants, all of which were beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, the results presented in this study will focus on the different ethnicity of the young adults, as this was the main factor that influenced their responses according to the pilot studies.

5.7 Exploratory survey

Results from the survey were analysed by classifying the same ethnic groups together. Answers to the questions were grouped together and basic counting methods were used, such as how many out of the twenty participants in the Malay groups, preferred to watch TV1, or TV 2, and so on. A simple percentage was calculated, primarily to show the differences between the answers for each question in the different ethnic groups. The classification of the analysis was as follows: most watched channel; source of programmes (local or imported); favourite local genres; favourite imported genres; preferred language of local genres; preferred language of imported genres; average time watching television per day; and average time watching television during the weekend.

5.8 Focus groups

During the focus group discussions, sessions were conducted in English and Malay. It was noted that there was a tendency for some participants to mix both languages during the discussion sessions. In the event that local slang was used, a close translation was made.

A short observation on the whole process of each session was also made to capture the character of the focus group involved. Any other particular features of the participants' contributions, such as 'laughter' 'enthusiasm' or 'sensitivity', were also noted during the sessions. However, the use of 'observations' here was very minimal, because the researcher wanted the participants to feel comfortable. Eye-contact was very important during the sessions, so that the participants felt that their views were appreciated and thus a rapport was established between the participants and the researcher, and so discussion was further stimulated. The process of transcribing the data also involved the identification of the different participants. In order to identify participants of the focus groups sessions, 'voice identification' technique were used. Therefore, at the beginning of the focus group discussion sessions, each and every participant was invited to introduce him or herself, stating their name, course and state of origin. These sections of the focus group sessions

were copied onto another tape for reference during transcription, in order to be more certain of 'who was saying what', during the sessions. It was felt that this way the participants would be more relaxed, which would generate a more 'natural style' discussion.

Since this study involved a small number of participants in the groups, the above technique was considered the most efficient way of identifying the participants. Other methods, such as participants saying their name at the beginning or asking participants to put up their hands when they wanted to voice their opinion, were not considered as appropriate for this study. This was because it would interrupt the flow of the sessions, and would also make participants feel too constrained, and under formal conditions during the discussions.

The tapes containing the participants' 'identities' were listened to over and over again for familiarisation. Added to that, a note of the type of voice (soft or husky) and the style of speech (Chinese or Indian accent, fast or slow etc) was written down on a small card and placed beside the researcher during the transcription process. If in doubt, the researcher would return to the 'identification' speech and double check the note about the participant's identity.

The next steps involved in the processing of data from the focus groups were reading and familiarisation. The complete transcription was read through several times in order to familiarise the researcher with all the ideas in the data. By reading a couple of times, the researcher also noted striking statements or potential themes for establishing 'coding' and 'headings' and to get rough ideas for the data analysis.

After reading and familiarisation, the data was then grouped according to ethnic groups, such as Indian 'A' and Indian 'B' together, and the same method was used for the remaining groups. The next stage involved grouping the responses to each question asked in the sessions. All of the responses to the same questions within and across the groups were put together. At this stage, sorting out the data was much more complicated. The

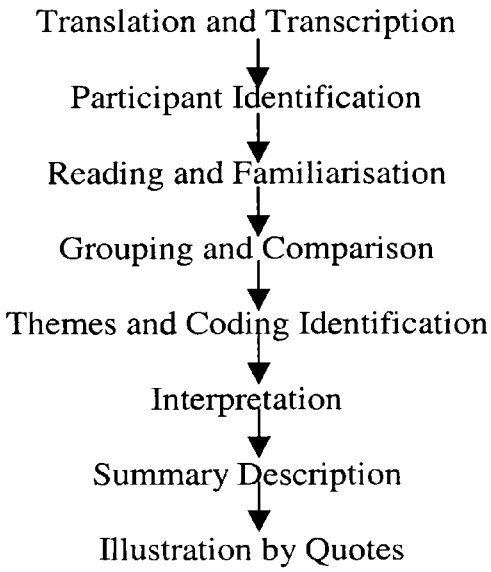
data was read through in order to produce 'a coding system', which included headings, categories, themes and sub-themes of the discussions.

The 'coding system' was established by looking for 'striking' statements (i.e. including how often it was mentioned and how strongly participants were expressing their views) in responses to each question within and across the groups. For example, words used in their answers, such as 'boring', 'outdated' 'bad' (for question 5 "What is your opinion of television channels in Malaysia in general?") all suggested that participants were talking about the 'quality 'of the programmes on TV 1. Thus, quality was identified as a theme or category for the description of TV 1. The views about this aspect of TV 1 were then grouped under the main heading: 'Viewing Habits and Perceptions of Television in Malaysia'.

It should be noted that the 'coding system' did not necessarily work for all of the questions, and that there were many cases in which the same themes or categories were also found in responses to other questions. Therefore, if two responses expressed the same meaning, they were then grouped under one theme or category. After the identification of the 'coding system', the responses were sorted out accordingly.

The data analysis then began with a comparison of themes highlighted by participants in the discussions. Responses to the same questions, or on the same themes and categories of responses, were compared and contrasted so as to see the similarities and differences between the different ethnic backgrounds within and across the groups. It should also be noted here that all questions asked during the sessions were given the same importance. This was because some very interesting comments from the participants resulted from the 'transition questions', which were supposed to direct the focus group sessions, and not necessarily from the 'key questions', which were supposed to be the centre of the discussions. To ignore such relevant aspects would only have resulted in missing out some valid data. This, in short, emphasises the 'dynamism' and 'uniqueness' of the focus group

method in producing rich and valuable data for the study. The next Chapter of this thesis presents the actual findings of the study. A brief note on the steps in the process of analysing the data is summarised as a model below:



The primary purpose of this study, as discussed above, is to contribute to a new debate on how young adults relate to images they see on television with regard to the notion of national identity in Malaysia. In the next chapter, the results from the data analysis will be presented.

- Chapter Six -

Findings and Discussions

6.0 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the importance of using focus group discussions as the main method of collecting valuable data for the study, and also the use of an exploratory survey to collect supplemental data. As noted, the objective in gathering data from an exploratory survey is to gain background information from young Malaysian adults regarding their television viewing habits in general. The use of focus groups is intended to get a more detailed picture of their viewing habits, their perceptions of 'national identity', and the role they attribute to television in shaping their sense of being Malaysian.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, academic studies based on focus group discussions about television audiences in Malaysia have so far been limited. Therefore, this study will attempt to provide some insights into this topic by exploring how audiences relate to television images, and how they perceive television programmes/images as articulating a sense of 'Malaysian national identity'. To recap, the exploratory survey was conducted by distributing 120 questionnaires to students from different ethnic backgrounds, with 20 respondents representing each ethnic group. Focus group sessions were conducted in Malaysia involving 12 groups with 59 participants from different backgrounds (that is, in terms of ethnicity, age, gender, state of origin, course at the university, year of study and exposure to television channels; see Chapter 5).

Results from the empirical work of the study will be presented as follows. Firstly, this chapter provides a breakdown of the data from the survey. Secondly, it provides the basis for an in-depth analysis of the data collected through the focus groups discussions.

6.1 Results from exploratory survey

It has to be noted from the outset that the results presented under this section are concerned with the primary findings of the exploratory survey. For further details about the results, see Appendix 7.

The survey results revealed that the general viewing habits of the young adults in this study were varied. It was evident that the latest television network, Ntv7, was preferred by a majority of the respondents surveyed. The Chinese respondents had the highest number of viewers for this channel. On the other hand, RTM 1 was less popular among the young adults. Only two respondents, one in a Malay group and the other in an ethnic minority group from Sarawak, indicated their preference for this channel. It was also evident that RTM 2 was preferred by most of the none-Malay respondents, whilst none of the Malay respondents indicated that they liked to watch this channel. Similarly none of the respondents surveyed indicated that they liked to watch MetroVision or Mega TV (see Table 1 Appendix 7).

The findings also suggest that there was a diverse range of preferences in watching local programmes among the young adults. Local news and film/drama ranked in the two highest places for most of the respondents. However, in general the majority of them indicated that they liked to watch local news in comparison to other local genres. This was most prominent among the Chinese respondents, and least so amongst the Indians. It was evident that more Malay respondents watched film/drama. This activity also extended to respondents representing Indian and ethnic minorities from Sabah (see Table 2 Appendix 7).

In terms of the language preference, it was evident that the findings revealed a more or less uniform preference. In general, most of the young adult respondents preferred to watch local programmes in the Malay language. This is particularly evident among ethnic

minorities from Sarawak. Indian respondents were least likely to watch programmes in the Malay language. The majority of them preferred to watch programmes in their own language and English. The trend towards watching more English programmes was also prevalent amongst Punjabi and Chinese respondents. Only a small number of the Chinese respondents preferred to watch local programmes in their own language, whilst none of the Punjabi respondents stated that they liked to watch local programmed in their own language. This was due to the unavailability of such programmes. The finding also suggests that most respondents representing the ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak, and for whom Malay was their mother tongue, were the least likely to programmes in English (see Table 3 Appendix 7).

In general, the majority of the respondents preferred to watch imported film/drama. This is most evident among respondents representing the Malay and Indian ethnic groups. Respondents representing ethnic minorities from Sarawak were the least likely to view film/drama. The findings also revealed that none of the respondents surveyed indicated that they liked to watch television magazines, sitcoms or Quiz/game show (see Table 4 Appendix 7).

The majority of the respondents preferred to watch imported programmes in English. This was particularly evident amongst the Punjabi and Sarawakian respondents. Chinese respondents were reported as the least inclined to watch imported programmes in English. It was apparent that they liked to watch imported programmes in their own language, more so than other ethnic groups. This trend was not prevalent amongst the Indian and Malay respondents. While the earlier, findings suggested that there were no respondents watching local programmes in Hindi, the findings for language preference for imported programmes showed contradictory results. It was evident that some respondents from the different ethnic backgrounds across the groups like to watch imported programmes in the Hindi language. This, brought the preference for programmes in Hindi second only to the

preference for English programmes. It was also clear that none of the participants preferred to watch imported programmes in Malay (see Table 5 Appendix 7).

Given the fact that the respondents have tight timetables as students, it was not surprising that the majority of them spent on average up to 2 hours watching television in a day, both during the weekdays and at the weekends. The findings suggest that the respondents who watched the most television during weekdays were the Punjabis. The majority of them spent between 6 to 8 hours a day. Malay respondents on the other hand, watched the least television during the weekdays, with the majority of them spending around 2 hours a day. During the weekends, a small number of the Indians and Punjabis spent between 6 to 8 hours per day. The ethnic group that watched the least television during the weekends was the Sarawakians (see Table 6 appendix 7).

Regarding the time they liked to watch television during weekdays, the findings showed a uniform pattern. In general it was evident that most of the respondents preferred to watch television after 7.00 pm. All of the Chinese, Indian and Punjabi respondents indicated that they liked to watch television during this time. Only a small number of Malay, Sabah and Sarawak respondents indicated that they liked to watch television before 9.00 am. During the weekends, the time preference for watching television was more varied. Contrasting with the time preference during the weekdays, most of the respondents watched television between 9-12 noon. Only a small number of Malay respondents like to watch before 9.00 am (see Table 7 and Appendix 7).

So, over all, the results from the exploratory survey, provide us with a general picture of young adults' viewing habits. More details about audience responses to television will be revealed in the findings from the focus group sessions. For a brief overview of the results of the background information of the participants see Appendix 8.

6.2 Results of the focus group sessions

In conducting the focus group sessions, a set of structured questions was used for all of the groups discussions. This was to ensure that all participants were presented with the same framework, thus allowing for specific and direct comparison within and across the groups. Each focus group session lasted between one and a half hours to two hours.

All discussions in the session were recorded, translated and transcribed. A systematic procedure was applied in processing the data. This involved reading and familiarisation, grouping, theme identification and detailed analysis within and across the groups. (see Chapter 5, for details). In order to analyse the complexity of audience responses in the focus group sessions, the results will be presented under four main headings: Viewing habits and perceptions Malaysian television; self identification and sense of belonging to the nation; television programmes, construction and deconstruction of 'national identity'; and television stereotypes and national unity.

6.2.1 Viewing habits and perceptions of Malaysian television

TV 1 / RTM 1:

TV1, better known as 'Saluran Perdana' (meaning 'Prime Channel'), was the first television channel to be established thirty-eight years ago. It is fully owned and controlled by the Malaysian government. For most of the participants in the focus groups, TV1 was generally regarded as consisting of low quality local programmes, was focussed on the Malays, and was concerned with the government's political agenda. In the focus group discussions, participants were invited to comment on television channels in Malaysia. Results of the background information revealed that TV 1 was the least watched channel among the participants. Thus it is not surprising to see that results from the focus groups discussions revealed broadly uniform opinions on TV1 with the majority of the participants voicing their criticisms. Most of them asserted that the majority of the programmes broadcast on TV 1 were poor in quality. They tended to label this channel as 'outdated', and 'boring'. One participant in the Malay groups commented:

> Azmah: "In my opinion TV1 is outdated, most of the programmes are not interesting at all". (Malay A, Female)

This view was also shared by other participants across the groups. One participant in the Punjabi group was outspoken about TV1.

> Navshier: "It stinks! Simply that". (Punjabi B, Male)

Similarly another female Chinese participant, Brenda noted 'everything about TV1 is boring'. One of the reasons given for participants reporting negative perceptions of TV1 was that programmes broadcast on this channel, which included local Malay drama, musical programmes, documentaries and other television genres, were largely of very low

quality. One Malay participant in the mixed group commented that most local dramas, had poor scripts and uninteresting plots. She noted:

> Anis: "In general, I think TV1 shows lots of local dramas, and some musical programs, as well as other programs, but, I think, most of them are not interesting".
>
> Moderator: "Why do you think they are not interesting?"
>
> Anis: "For example, in the Malay dramas, the plots are all the same, about maritial problems, and these themes and plots go round and round in circles, back to the same old stories; there is nothing new".
>
> (Malay- Mixed B, Female)

Another participant from Sarawak in the Sabah and Sarawak group commented on the poor acting and lack of local talent, which she thinks is one of the reasons why local drama on TV1 was perceived as uninteresting. She commented:

> Rita: "Most of the actors are boring...their acting is not real, if they speak a dialogue, it is half hearted. It's really bad".
>
> (Sarawak- Sabah and Sarawak, Female)

Whilst some participants commented on the quality of scripts and acting skills in drama, another participant in the Malay group, made a comparison of the technical aspects of news production on TV1 with other channels. He noted:

> Ahmad Nabil: "If you look at the news on TV1, you can see there is no professionalism. The lighting and the background are dull, moreover, if you look at the newscasters, they are all ...not interesting, 'the same old faces' not like on TV3 or NTV7; they are more professional". (Malay A, Male)

Another participants made a connection between the quality of the programmes on TV1 and the main objective of the channel. He claimed:

> Umi Salmah: "I don't think they have a budget for making interesting programmes". (Malay B, Female)
>
> Zain: "Not only that, since TV1 is the government channel, I think, the main objective is not to make a profit; they are more for providing information mainly concerned with the government; that is why we see only dull programmes".
>
> (Malay B, Male)

It was also evident from the focus group results that the quality of the programmes available on TV1 directly influenced their viewing habits of that channel.

> Prekha: "I don't know for how many thousands of years now, I've never watched TV1; the quality is so bad". (Indian B, Female)
>
> Jastina: "I never watch it; it is extremely boring' (laugh)
>
> (Punjabi A, Female)
>
> Surinder: "I don't know what to comment (laugh) because I never watch it".
>
> (Punjabi A, Female)
>
> Pretam: "Same here, no comment, I never watch it either". (Punjabi B, Male)

For one participant in the Chinese group, his decision to watch TV1 was not made by choice but because the programmes he wanted to watch were not available on other channels.

> Richard: "I only watch television when there is live coverage on sports particularly badminton that's all".
>
> Moderator: "Why do you choose to watch those particular programmes?"

Richard: "I have to watch TV1, because there aren't any live broadcasts on this kind of sport on other channels, not even on TV2 or TV3. Perhaps TVI has other programmes, like Malay, but I never watch it. It is so boring. (...) and also, me and my friends all agree that TV1 is for 'the older generation".

(Chinese B, Male)

The analysis also revealed that most participants across and within the groups acknowledged the close relationship between the ownership and control of TV1 and the programmes broadcast on the channel. Results from the focus group discussions revealed that participants within the groups (Malay groups) and across the groups (Mixed, Punjabi and Sabah groups) claimed that TV1, most of the time, was concerned with the political agenda of the government. All the programmes on TV1, they claimed, were channelled towards the government's policies and ideologies.

While making some negative comments regarding TV1 as the government's medium, some participants emphasised that they were not anti-government. As one participant in the Malay groups explained:

Razak: "TVI is the medium of the government; its main objective is to deliver government policies, and what the government has done; we are not anti-government; this is only a comment".

Moderator: "What type of programmes do you think...?"

Razak: "...in news... talk shows... None of this is interesting; it is more about the government's ideas and policies. This is the priority".

(Malay B, Male)

Similarly, other participants in the mixed groups shared the above views on the concentration of government programmes on TV1:

Muin: "On TV1 there are always speeches from the Sultan and the Ministers in the news. For instance there is lots of coverage about them. Giving speeches, attending ceremonies and so on". (Sarawak, Mixed B, Male)

High saturation by government ideology on TV1 also resulted in one Punjabi participant switching off the channel. She stated thus:

Surinder: "I won't watch TV1, ...too government oriented. Whatever the government says everybody has to follow... you see most local programmes concern government policies; we are not like the Americans, or the British; they are more open". (Punjabi A, Female)

However, the analysis did reveal two accounts where participants expressed positive opinions about TV 1. This was found among participants in the Sabah group. Steve, a male participant, suggested that TV1 did reflect the identity of Malaysia because most programmes provided information about the 'local situation'.

Steve: "Since TV1 is the government channel, it is fair that it broadcasts lots of local programmes... that reflects the image of Malaysia."

Moderator: "Would you like to elaborate more?

Steve: "Well in news and other programmes, there is information about Malaysia, (...) about what is happening here". (Sabah, Male)

Another participant in the same group saw in the kind of images described by Steve an effort to promote patriotism in all Malaysians:

Jolina: "Well in my opinion, TV1 instills a sense of patriotism in the hearts of the Malaysians.... I can say that they are trying to instill love for the country amongst the Malaysians".

Moderator: "Would you like to tell me the kind of images or programmes that promote a sense of patriotism?"

Jolina: "Well, patriotic songs?" (Sabah, Female)

The discussion about TV1 was also extended to the programmes available on TV1. The participants in the Indian, Chinese and Punjabi groups also revealed that TV1 focused on the Malay and Islamic religions. With the exception of the Malay and Sabah and Sarawak groups, this issue was raised in all of the focus group discussions. Most participants pointed out that TV1 broadcast lots of local Malay-made programmes.

Malina: " In my opinion, TV1 is only watched by the Malays because TV1 has only specifically Malay programmes. It is mainly Islam...Malay dramas (...) and so on...it is not related to other ethnic groups in Malaysia, compared with other channels". (Indian-Mixed B, Female)

Remy: "It's the worst. I don't watch TV1, It has lots of Malay programmes and dramas... we never watch it". (Indian A, Male)

Sita: "Everyone, huh. I thought it was only me". (Indian A, Female)

Other participants in the Chinese groups revealed a similar point of view:

Fu Ying: "There is not much choice for us; all the programmes are in the Malay language and about the Malays, (...) which I don't really watch.. It's not interesting". (Chinese A, Female)

In addition, one participant in the same group commented that TV1 broadcast lots of Islamic religious programmes, which was not in his interest, perhaps because he does not practise Islam:

Chia Cheng: "It's related to Islam, lots of Islamic programmes. It doesn't interest me, I don't practice Islam". (Chinese B, Male)

Concerning TV1, in general, participants voiced their criticism in terms of its 'low quality', its undue 'focus on the Malays' and for 'serving the government's agenda'. As discussed earlier, almost all the participants commented on the low quality of programmes available on TV1. However the comments on TVI focussing only on the Malays came from the Chinese, Indian and Punjabi groups and not from the Malay or Sabah and Sarawak groups. Meanwhile the comments that TV1 was concerned with promoting the government's agenda mostly came from the participants in the Malay, Punjabi, Sabah and Sarawak groups, with none of the Chinese or Indian participants commenting on this issue. In the analysis, two accounts were found expressing positive opinion about the government's control of TV 1, which both came from participants from Sabah.

TV2/RTM 2:

TV2, better known as the 'Golden Channel', is another channel own by the government. The word 'Golden' itself implies that TV2's objective, besides providing information, is also to make a profit (Ramlah Jalee, Documentation Unit, Angkasapuri, Personal Interview). One participant in the focus group sessions echoed this statement. Jastina, a female Punjabi, asserts' TV2 is more commercial compared to TV1'. Thus it is not surprising to see that TV2 strives to broadcast lots of imported programmes, to attract viewers, thus gaining more advertising revenue.

In contrast with their views on the government channel TV1, the majority of the participants across and within the groups noted that TV2 was of far better 'quality' and 'more interesting' compared to TV1'. For example, one male participant in the Chinese group commented: 'Generally, programmes on TV2 are far better, compared to programmes on TV1 (Chinese A, Male). Other participants in the Indian groups shared this

view. Both Remy, a male participant, and Sita, a female participant commented that TV2 was 'interesting and entertaining'.

While the above comments describe the 'good' points that TV2 has in comparison with TV1, the next section reveals the reasons for holding such positive views on TV2. Some of the participants across the groups asserted that one of the reasons that TV2 was 'better' and 'more interesting' was due to the fact that it broadcast a number of imported programmes. Harry, a male participant from Sabah, echoes this:

> Harry: "TV2 is more commercial compared to TV1, and all of the programmes are imported". (Sabah, Male)

Imported programmes for most of the participants were not only more interesting and of better quality but also added variety to the kind of programmes available.

> Umi Salmah: "TV2 is different to TV1 because it has lots of imported programmes, for example, Chinese and English programmes. It is interesting". (Malay A, Female)

In the analysis, it was also evident that most of the participants not only thought that imported programmes were better in quality, but also asserted that TV2 provided a variety of programmes that catered for all of the Malaysian population. Thus one Chinese participant asserted:

> Fung Nee: "TV2 is okay because this channel shows all kinds of programmes for everyone such as Tamil programmes, Malay programmes, Chinese programmes and English programmes. So we have quite a variety to choose from. (Chinese, B, Female)

Another Malay participant, Norhazni, asserted that imported programmes play a significant role in providing television programmes for multi-ethnic audiences in Malaysia:

Norhazni: "TV2 imports a lot of programmes for broadcasting to all Malaysians". (Malay A, Female)

An exchange of ideas between two female participants, as illustrated below shows, that on TV2, the effort to use a medium of interaction other than the Malay language met with approval by the participants.

Azmah: "Most of the programmes on TV 2 are in English".

Norhazni: " I think it is good that the government does that, because we are a multi-ethnic country. So the Malays can choose to watch the news in the Malay language on TV1 and on TV2, there is the English news".

(Malay A, Female)

In one case, Kavita, a female Punjabi participant, pointed out that the English news has become her main source of information because she dislikes watching the news in the Malay language:

Kavita: "I like the English news".

Moderator: "How about the news in the Malay language?"

Kavita: "I don't like to watch the news in Malay ". (Laugh)

(Punjabi A, Female)

While the earlier discussion about TV 2 demonstrated positive views about the second channel, other responses from the majority of Sabah and Sarawak participants and some from the Indian group responded with negative views about TV2.

In the analysis, although the majority of the participants expressed positive views on TV2, the variety of programmes seemed to displease other participants. One female participant in the Sabah and Sarawak group commented that she noticed that TV2 had made improvements in terms of quality and agreed that it now had a variety of programmes

compared with what it offered previously, which had positively influenced her viewing habits. However, she claimed that the greater variety of programmes had been followed with more interruptions by advertisements, which annoyed her:

> Rita: "Last time, it was so boring, now, there is a bit of change. For example, there are documentary programmes and I like watching them. But now, there are so many advertisements, for 5 minutes, and every, 10 minutes there are more advertisements". (Sabah-Sabah and Sarawak,Female)

Some Sabahan and Sarawakian participants, and some Indian participants expressed other negative views about TV2. Some voiced their frustration about the distribution of programmes for different ethnic backgrounds which ignored their 'presence. One male participant from the Sabah group commented that the TV2 programming schedule did not give 'fair treatment' to ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak:

> Harry: "On TV2 there are Hindi movies, and new shows in Tamil called 'Nadaria', and some other Chinese programmes, but there is nothing for Sabah and Sarawak; it is not fair". (Sabah, Male)

Harry's views on the limited exposure on Sabah and Sarawak were also shared by other participants in the Sabah and Sarawak group:

> Ruslan: "The exposure from Sabah and Sarwak is limited. Sometimes we can see that it is obvious that TV1 and TV2 do not give any exposure on Sabah and Sarawak". (Sarawak-Sabah and Sarawak, Male)

The limitation of programmes about Sabah and Sarwak in one participant's view, Vennie, had political implications. Thus she noted:

> Vennie: "On TV2, there are very seldom programmes about Sabah and Sarawak,...only during election periods". (Sarawak, Female)

The notion that TV2 did not cater for the other ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak was echoed by two female Indian participants, Prekha and Malina.

> Prekha: "TV2 has lots of programmes for almost everyone but nothing for Sabah and Sarawak". (Indian B, Female)

> Malina: "There's hardly any portrayal of people from Sabah and Sarawak, except in some musical programmes in the afternoon and the time is not suitable at all". (Indian-Mixed B, Female)

So, in conclusion, the perceptions of the two government channels, TV1 and TV2, indicate two contrasting views among participants in the focus group discussions. With regard to TV2, most participants across the groups, except for participants from Sabah and Sarawak, voiced their positive opinions about the second channel which covered the 'variety and the quality of imported programmes' and the 'variety of programmes for different ethnic backgrounds'. Thus we have seen that some participants, mainly from Sabah and Sarawak, and to a lesser extent from the Indian groups, expressed negative views about TV2. One participant from Sabah commented that there were too many advertisements, which interrupted her viewing. Meanwhile, others from Sabah and Sarawak, and some Indian participants, commented on the limitation of programmes about Sabah and Sarawak.

Commercial TV

TV 3:

An open policy adopted seventeen years ago allowed the first 'private' or commercial television station, TV3, to operate in Malaysia in 1984. This significant date marked a turning point in the development of the television industry in Malaysia, and more recently we have seen the encouragement of the development of more commercial television stations which include Metrovison, two pay television channels, Mega TV and ASTRO,

and the latest, NTV7. The analysis revealed one account of a participant's awareness of data that indicated TV3 was the favourite programme in comparison to other channels. Muin, a participant from Sarawak states:

> Muin: "A previous investigation showed that Malaysian people like to watch TV3 rather than other channels". (Sarawak-Mixed B, Female)

From the list of names and background information it was apparent that TV3 was the most popular among the participants who attended the sessions. Out of 59 participants, 24 chose it as their first choice, thus it is not surprising to see that most of the comments about TV3 are of a uniformly positive attitude. In the analysis one comment was found observing that the arrival of TV3 had made a positive contribution to television industry in Malaysia.

> Zain: "With TV3, things are better compared to previous years'.
>
> Moderator: "What do you mean?"
>
> Zain: "Well we used to have only two channels, but now we have TV3, NTV7, and all of them are competing with each other to get more viewers, they show a lot of interesting programmes". (Malay B, Male)

Some participants noted that TV 3 was one of their favourites because it 'suits their tastes', and commented:

> Ruslan: "It is sensational; it suits all ages. In the afternoon at 1.30 pm there is a kids" hour, for teenagers in the evening, and at night for adults. It is good."
>
> (Sarawak-Sabah and Sarawak, Male)
>
> Shafiza: "I agree. Their time scheduling is very good, all of us of different ages can enjoy it. There is a news bulletin scheduled every hour or so, so if anyone misses it the first time, they can catch it again the next hour. It keeps us informed. At night, they have one hour of news, not like the other channels,

which only have half an hour, so we have more time to watch the news. It's very efficient and really is one of the best".

(Sarawak-Sabah and Sarwak, Female)

As well as comments on their preferred entertainment programmes, there were also responses by participants who enjoyed watching the news on television. However, comments on the news on TV3 were concerned with the 'technical' and 'cosmetic' aspects of it rather than the news content:

Roona: "I like the news, the style of presentation is interesting, and the newscasters are superb". (Punjabi B, Female)

Similarly, other participants from the Indian groups stated the same views about the newscasters on TV3. They also made a comparison between the television news on TV1 and TV3, but this time stressed the 'outlook' of the newscasters, as well as their ability to 'present' the news rather than simply commenting on the news content itself. One of the participants stated that the news was one of her 'favourite' genres on TV3 because she was interested in the 'professionalism' of the newscasters, which she saw as the 'outlook', 'the way they dress and make up' and 'their presentation', 'the way they read the news'. She explains:

Jayanti: "I like the newscasters (laugh). They have professionalism in the way they dress and make up, the way they read the news. They are not like on TV1 where there is no profesionalism at all". (Indian B, Female)

On the other hand, a male participant voiced another perspective on the positive aspect of the news on TV3, focussing on the style of language and the use of standard Malay pronunciation in presenting the news:

Azmi: "I think TV 3 is still the best compared to other channels. If you look at the news, it is interesting because they use 'Bahasa Baku' (Standard Malay pronunciation), even on TV1 which is owned by the government they don't use 'Bahasa Baku' but they ask us to use 'Bahasa Baku'" (Malay B, Male)

While most responses about TV3, as discussed above, centred on locally or home produced programmes including both entertainment and factual ones, other responses from the focus group sessions revealed a different set of views. Some participants declared that imported programmes were more appealing to them and the two prominent genres mentioned in the focus groups sessions were documentary and sitcom.

One Punjabi participant asserted that his preference for watching imported programmes was due to the fact that local programmes on TV3 were poor in quality. Accordingly, he states:

Navshier: "Imported programmes are very good. I like National geography, stuff like that. Not drama, Malay dramas, or Chinese dramas, the one at 5.30 in the evening is really bad". (Punjabi B, Male)

The preference of imported programmes to local ones also included other entertainment programmes. Kawai, a male Chinese participant, states:

Kawai: "I like to watch sitcom".

Moderator: "Local or imported?"

Kawai: "Imported". (Chinese A, Male)

The notion that TV3 had a good selection of locally and imported programmes was, for some participants, tied to the economic factor. Amongst the views expressed was that TV3 had more interesting programmes because its main objective was to make a profit. As Navshier points out:

Navshier: " For TV3 the interest is more on maximising their profits".

(Punjabi B, Male)

Another participant, Muin, connected the status of the television Channel TV3 with the interesting types of programmes being broadcast on it:

> Muin: "Maybe because it is a private channel, that is why most of the programmes are more interesting; they strive to make a profit rather than any other objective". (Sabah-Mixed B, Female)

Santokh commented on the interesting programmes, giving other reasons for their success, connected with sponsorship and advertising:

> Santokh: "Some programmes get sponsorship from big companies, like 'Dunhil', 'Peter Styevesant' and so on. They give priority to the advertisements". (Punjabi, Mixed B, Male)

While earlier comments on TV3, all indicated positive views, other comments from some Malay, Indian, Sabah and Punjabi participants held contrasting views about TV3. These participants commented on the 'changes in programme style' of TV3, which was directly implicated with the use of 'censorship'. One Sabahan participant, Harry, asserted that in previous years, TV3 had been broadcasting a lot of interesting programmes, but gradually the types of programmes broadcast was becoming less interesting:

> Harry: "In previous years, programmes on TV3 were good but now it is not that good any more, when the station first went on air, the programmes were good, like the latest movies, but now it is not as interesting as before. Now, there are more talk shows and discussions about the economy, and stuff like that, it's boring". (Sabah, Male)

The notion that in recent years TV3 had been less interesting compared to the previous years, in other participants views, was connected with 'state control'. Accordingly an exchange of remarks between Razak and Zain, from the Malay group, illustrates:

> Razak: "Well, TV3 used to be good but lately, it gives more support to the government". (Malay B, Male)
>
> Zain: (Interupts) "The news supports the government and never criticises the government". (Malay B, Male)

Similarly, other participants in the Punjabi groups underlined the issues of censorship on TV3 and included imported entertainment programmes in their comments. The discussion within the groups was as follows:

> Jastina: " A lot of censorship". (Punjabi B, Female)
>
> Moderator: "Is it in local or imported programmes?".
>
> Jastina: "Both local and imported programmes". (Punjabi B, Female)
>
> Navshier: "Even in Hindi movies, there is censorship. Censorship... it is very boring actually". (Punjabi B, Male)
>
> Surinder: "Yes I got fed up with it". (Punjabi B, Male)
>
> Jastina: " It goes from one scene...". (Punjabi B, Female)
>
> Navshier: (Interrupts) and than there is another scene, all of a sudden." (Punjabi B, Male)

However, other participants did not share these views that the programmes had been 'edited'. An Indian participant in the mixed groups and a participant in the Malay group both asserted that TV 3 had more 'freedom' in comparison to both TV 1 and TV 2.

Sita: "TV 3 and Ntv 7 are private; they can show everything, but not TV2 or TV1. They are still limited". (Indian-Mixed B, Female)

Norhazni: " The news on TV3 is more concern with other aspects, such as social problems in Malaysia, not like the news on TV1 and TV2, they are concerned with the government". (Malay A, Female)

So regarding the first commercial or private television station, TV3, the majority of the participants across the groups, namely from the Indian, Malay and Chinese ethnic backgrounds, and the ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak held positive views, making comments on the interesting programmes and the efficiency of TV3. However there were also Punjabi participants and one Malay who clearly expressed negative views about TV 3, which indicated their dissatisfaction with government control and censorship of programmes on TV 3.

Ntv7.

National Television Seven, better known as Ntv7, the latest television network, was introduced in 1998. It is owned by a business tycoon from Sarawak. The main objective of the introduction of Ntv7 is to promote-nation building and to further integrate the Peninsular with East Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. When participants were invited to comment on the latest television Channel, the results seemed to confirm the objective of Ntv7, since the majority of the participants asserted that Ntv7 was entertaining, and a small number of participants commented on the Ntv7 effort to promote integration between the east (Sabah and Sarawak) and the west of Malaysia (Peninsular).

Results from the background information survey of on the participants revealed that Ntv7 is the second most watched television Channel, with 24 out of 59 participants choosing Ntv7 as their first choice. The majority of the participants considered Ntv7 as an entertaining channel. Thus a female participant from Sarawak asserted: "Their focus is

entertainment". Other participants across the group voiced similar views. Nash, a male participant in the Malay group, stated that Ntv7 was his favourite television channel amongst all the other channels:

> Nash: "It is good and I like it most, compared to the other channels".
>
> (Malay B, Male)

Another participant, Jolina, was fascinated by the performance of Ntv7 considering the channel is still new compared to other channels. She also noted the effort of Ntv7 in broadcasting the latest programmes to attract audiences, especially the younger generation.

> Jolina: "Well, Ntv7 is interesting. It is still new but it's got lots of entertainment shows. It is trying to get audiences, because it is still new and they are airing new shows, more for the younger generation (laugh), teenagers. (laugh)" (Sabah, Female)

The discussion about the quality of programmes on Ntv7 by some participants in the Malay groups revealed that their viewing of Ntv7 was limited to local programmes in their own language. As the following discussions between Umi Salmah and Azmah, both female Malay participants, demonstrate:

> Umi Salmah: "The dramas shown on Ntv7 are better quality compared to other local dramas on other television channels. For instance, the actors in *'Idaman'* and *'Impian'* on Ntv7 are all good.". (Malay A, Female)
>
> Azmah: ".Yes, I agree, and the programmes are mostly new".
>
> (Malay A, Female)

In the analysis it also emerged that other participants from different ethnic backgrounds appreciated watching local sitcoms on Ntv7. *'Kopitiam'*, an English language local sitcom for example:

Sosch: 'The sitcoms are really good." (Punjabi A, Male)

Jastina: "The local ones are worth watching". (Punjabi A, Female)

Navshier: "Especially *Kopitiam*". (Punjabi A, Male)

Jastina: "The acting is really superb". (Punjabi A, Female)

In the discussions among other participants about their favourite programmes on Ntv7 the participants in the Indian groups preferred watching programmes in their own language but still, priority was given to imported ones, as the following exchange between participants illustrates:

Sita: " The Tamil drama is so special, because it continues from one week to another and we all get addicted to it. We can't wait to see what is going to happen next !" (Indian B, Female)

Remy: "Yes, me too. I like watching them too." (Indian A, male)

Moderator: "Is this local or imported drama?"

Sita: Both, I watch both, but the imported ones are better"

Remy: "Same here". (Indian A, Female)

While some participants stated that they liked to watch locally produced programmes on Ntv7, other responses provided a contrasting view. One Chinese participant, Richard, revealed that imported programmes had become his priority for watching on Ntv7 and showed no interest in local ones. Accordingly, he states:

Richard: "Ntv7 has lots of movies, all kinds of programmes from the U.S. and broadcasts lots of music videos compared to other channels. Most of the time I watch music video shows by Ntv7, ... they show *Michael Jackson*, *Mariah Carey* and concerts from Taiwan and Hong Kong. I like to watch them, except on Friday, I didn't watch, because they put on 'Raihan'". (referring to one of the Malay-Islamic religious group singers) (Chinese B, Male)

Although it is known that Ntv7 is owned by a businessperson from Sarawak, and that its mission is to promote integration between East and West Malaysia, not many participants commented on this issue. Only a small number of participants in the Sabah and Sarawak, Sabah, and an Indian participant from mixed groups pointed out the effort made by Ntv7 to promote other ethnic groups from Sabah and Sarawak. Chirsty, a female Indian in the mixed group, noted the effort made by Ntv7 to promote other ethnic groups from Sabah and Sarawak, and linked this to the owner of Ntv7.

Christy: "Ntv7 shows programmes about East Malaysia because the boss of the station is from there. So he pays attention to that area, promoting East Malaysia". (Indian-Mixed A, Male)

The view that NTV7 promoted the integration of East and West Malaysia was shared by other ethnic minorities from the Sabah and Sarawak group:

Vennie: "They are trying to close the gap between the East and the West and there are some efforts made, some cultural shows about Sabah and Sarawak."

(Sabah, Female)

While some participants considered that there was an effort made to 'include' programmes about Sabah and Sarawak, however, a response from one Chinese participant indicated some uncertainty on this issue:

Lim Seng: " I think Ntv7 has equal slots for all races".

Moderotor: "Do you think it included programmes about Sabah and Sarawak?"

Lim Seng: "Sabah and Sarawak? I don't think so".

(Chinese B, Male)

In the analysis, two accounts were also found where the participants talked about the news on Ntv7. However, the focus was more on the 'style' rather than on the content of the news. Vennie, a female participant from the ethnic minority from Sabah, made a comparison between the style of presentation of the news on Ntv7 with two other channels, TV 1 and TV 3.

Vennie: 'Well you see, the news on Ntv7 is more entertaining, and the style of reading it is more relaxed, not like the style of reading the news on TV 1 and TV3; they are more formal". (Sabah, Female)

While most of the participants expressed positive comments about Ntv7, there was one instance of a negative comment about Ntv7 when one Indian participant expressed her frustration with the scheduling:

Jayanti: "Ntv7 has one problem: they keep changing the programmes too often Let's say they put on *Warrior Princess* this week, and next week they put on *Sinbad.* It is so irritating. So I'll be eagerly waiting for my *Warrior Princess* but something else comes on". (Indian B, Female)

In short, from the responses expressing views on Ntv7, the majority of the participants tended to hold positive perceptions about the new channel, and some participants from the Malay, Indian, Chinese and Sabah groups, asserted that it was an entertaining channel to watch. The notion that Ntv7 was entertaining was directly associated with the quality of the programmes, both national and imported, available on Ntv7. Preferences in viewing

were more diffused. For the Malays, most of them preferred to watch programmes in their own language, which were locally produced. Similarly, Indian participants also indicated that they preferred to watch programmes in their own language, but preferred imported ones. Some Punjabi participants indicated their preference for local sitcoms in English. In contrast, other participants in the Chinese group indicated that they preferred to watch imported programmes only, as they claimed that local programmes were not interesting due to their poor quality.

It was also evident that some participants in the Indian, Chinese, Sabah and Sarawak groups referred to efforts made to promote and integrate East and West Malaysia through cultural programmes and festival celebrations from Sabah and Sarawak. However, on one occasion it was found that a participant from a Chinese group considered that Ntv7's programmes catered for all ethnic groups in Malaysia, but excluded Sabah and Sarawak. Malay participants on the other hand were concerned on types of programming on Ntv7.

Like some comments about the television news on TV3, participants talked about the news on Ntv7 with reference to the 'style' rather than the content of the news but mentioned this on only two occasions, in the Malay and Sabah groups. Another aspect of Ntv7 that concerned these participants was a disappointment with programme scheduling and one participant from the Indian group echoed this view.

MetroVision

MetroVision is the second private and commercial television station, and was introduced in late 1985 with coverage limited to the central urban area, the Kelang Valley. Thus it is not surprising to see that out of the fifty-nine participants who came to the discussion group sessions, there was only a small number (eight participants across the groups) who watched MetroVision. None of the Sabah and Sarawak participants have access to Metrovission. In general, participants who had watched MetroVision reported uniformly that there were a

lot of imported programmes on the channel. Thus, one participant in the Malay group stated:

> Umi Salmah: "They have more imported programmes; in the evening they have cartoons and movies and in the night, documentaries".
>
> (Malay A, Female)

Another Malay participant in the mixed group, Anis, asserted that besides broadcasting a lot of imported programmes, MetroVision also gave great prominence to the English language:

> Anis: "Programmes on Metro are mostly in English, and there are lots of foreign programmes." (Malay, Mixed Group B, Female)

One respondent in the Punjabi group indicated that he enjoyed programmes on MetroVision:

> Pretam: Mostly foreign programmes. I like Third Rock from the Sun, that's my favourite". (Punjabi A, Male)

Wai Tam, a participant from a Chinese group, and Azmi, from a Malay group, said that they tended to spend most of their time watching imported programmes on MetroVision and did not know of any local programmes being aired on the channel:

> Wai Tam: "A lot of sitcoms, interesting sitcoms, all the new sitcoms are from America. Mostly foreign programmes imported ones".
>
> Moderator: "Are there any local programmes?"
>
> Wai Tam: "I did not notice. (Laugh). Mostly between 8 p.m and 12 they have slots for foreign programmes. I think most of the time there are slots for foreign programmes." (Chinese A, Male)

Heavy emphasises on entertainment programmes also resulted in MetroVision having to depend on TV1 as its source of news. This is illustrated by Azmi's statement:

> Azmi: "The news...well it's not really very good; in fact the station takes the news from RTM'.
>
> Moderator: "It is the same news available on TV1 and TV2?"
>
> Azmi: "Yes". (Malay, B, Male)

In the analysis, one account mentioned censorship of imported programmes aired on MetroVision. One participant found the censorship of imported programmes annoying and disruptive:

> Nash: "Well, there are a lot of imported programmes, western culture, and lots of censorship too on the programmes. Sometimes it has an effect on the story line and it is not that smooth". (Malay B, Male)

Other participants, Wai Tam, from the Chinese group and Azmi from the Malay group, commented on the limitations of MetroVision's coverage:

> Wai Tam: "It's only in Kelang". (Chinese A, Male)
>
> Azmi: "Well, it should be broadcast all over the country, Now it is only available in the Kelang Valley".

Subscription Base Television

ASTRO:

After the lifting of the ban on the use of parabolic satellite dishes, the first Malaysian satellite television station under the brand name ASTRO was introduced in 1996. Of the fifty nine participants who came to the focus group discussions, twelve had access to

ASTRO. With the variety of programmes on offer on ASTRO it is not surprising to see that most of the comments from the participants indicated that ASTRO was their preferred channel as it had lots of interesting programmes.

One Chinese female participant stated that ASTRO was her favourite because it had a variety of programmes that interested her. Moreover, she noted that ASTRO was more interesting in comparison to TV1 and TV2:

> Brenda: "That's my first choice; there are cartoons (Laugh), *MTV,* Channel 5...some Taiwanese programmes". (ChineseA, Female)
>
> Moderator: "What do you think of the programmes?"
>
> Brenda: "Interesting, compared to TV 1 or TV 2, so that is why it is my first choice". (Chinese A, Male)

Some participants chose to watch music programmes, which for them were the most entertaining together with other types of programmes, mainly from imported sources. Nash, a Malay participant, said that he preferred to watch musical programmes:

> Nash: "Well, I watch more musical programmes. There are other channels, available, like *HBO* and Extra, but I like to watch musical programmes. They're good". (Malay B, Male)

Similarly, Navshier, a male Punjabi, noted choosing musical programmes as the main source for entertainment:

> Navshier: 'They are superb, I am addicted to MTV. My mom likes to watch Hindi movies, on *Vanaavil*, from 'Bollywood' I like to watch HBO, ESPN, the sports channels...cartoon'. (Punjabi B, Male)

It was also evident from his comments that the younger generation mostly watched entertainment programmes from imported sources in English, while the older generation

("My mom likes to watch Hindi movies") preferred to watch programmes in their own language, and mainly from an imported source.

Another participant, representing a minority group from Sabah, noted that he preferred to watch ASTRO because of the nature of its programming where the emphasis was given to entertainment programmes rather than factual programmes:

> Reza: "ASTRO is the kind of entertainment for me. It has many channels. I prefer music channels. 80% of the programmes are entertainment, and some are factual programmes like news and documentary channels."
>
> (Sabah-Sabah and Sarawak, Male).

Reza's account also asserted that his preference was for imported programmes, particularly from India, in comparison to other sources:

> Reza: "I also like Hindi movies. Whenever I want to watch Hindi movies, I always tune in. Sometimes I watch Malay programmes on *'Astro Ria'* (a Malay Channel), and sometimes I watch Chinese movies, on *'Wah Lai Toi'* but very seldom, unless there is an interesting movie".
>
> (Sabah-Sabah and Sarawak, Male)

Similarly, other Indian participants in the discussions groups indicated a variety of preferred programmes. This exchange between Remy and Sita reveals their choice of programmes on ASTRO:

> Remy: "There are lots of channels there. I choose Indian movies and then sports, or video clips for music. They have 2 channels for music. For the news *CNN*, for the economy, *NBC*, It also has movie channels, *HBO*".
>
> (Indian A, Male)
>
> Sita: (Interupts) 'Cartoons'. (Indian A, Female)
>
> Remy: "My favourite is *'Vanaavil*". (Referring to the Indian channel)

Moderator: "What is on '*Vaanavil*'?"

Remy "Lots of stuff, movies, songs. Recently, it has new programmes on how to learn Tamil, fifty episodes, on how to learn Tamil from A to Z. They brought lectures from India, to teach Tamil". (Indian A, Male)

While most of the participants expressed their satisfaction in watching ASTRO, some comments put forward negative views. Azmi and Anis, Malay male participants, mentioned the trend of 'reruns' used by ASTRO that displeased them:

Azmi: "Lots of repeated programmes". (Malay B, Male)

Anis: "Sometimes it is nice; sometimes it is very boring because they repeat the same programme four or five times. The reason probably is that some of us are busy at certain times and cannot watch a certain programme at a certain time, so they repeat programmes on ASTRO so that others have a chance to watch them". (Malay-Mixed B, Female)

Other comments about ASTRO were made about the expense, which meant that not all of the population could afford to have access to ASTRO.

Malina: "Not everybody can afford to install ASTRO because it costs RM 80.00 monthly. Other channels are free, except for cable TV, of course, and the programmes are also interesting, so why would people want to spend so much money every month?" (Indian-Mixed B, Female)

Also, in the analysis one account commenting on the news on ASTRO was found. For Harry, a male participant from Sabah group, there was a belief that the foreign news had greater 'reliability' in its reporting in comparison to the local news:

Harry: "ASTRO is really good, and something like *CNN*. I think that *CNN* is really good because they are not biased. Maybe they did not tell lies during the news. You saw the Clinton case; they told everything". (Sabah, Male)

Moderator: "Any more comments?"

Harry: "Well, I normally watch *CNN* first, then National Geography and then I'll watch some cartoon programmes" (laugh). (Sabah, Male)

So those who had access to satellite television were largely from the Indian group. Most of the views on satellite television focussed on participants' favourite programmes. These were mainly imported entertainment programmes, enjoyed were by participants in the Malay, Chinese, Punjabi, Indian groups and minorities from Sabah and Sarawak. Some negative views about ASTRO were also found, mainly concerning its 'repeat' scheduling, and the expense of buying ASTRO, which were articulated by participants from the Malay and Indian backgrounds respectively. There was also a belief that the foreign news had relatively more 'reliability' and 'credibility', as was mentioned by one participant from the ethnic minority of Sabah.

Mega TV (Cable Television)

Mega cable network television was the first pay television to be introduced in Malaysia. It was introduced in 1985, and was a subsidiary of TV 3. Participants who came to the discussions did not have access to Mega TV, apart from two participants in the Malay and the Punjabi groups. Both the participants made brief comments on the programmes:

Norhazni: Okay, the programmes are interesting, especially on *HBO*, that's what I normally watch". (Malay A, Female)

Surinder: I normally watch English movies; they are interesting. Sometimes I watch *CNN*, and other stuff; it depends on my mood, what I feel like watching." (Punjabi A, Female)

Moderator: "What do you think of the news?"

Surinder: Okay. There's more freedom of speech there". (laugh).

(Punjabi A, Female)

Conclusion

In conclusion, amongst the participants who turned up for the discussions there was a wide exposure to diverse television channels, thus providing a variety of views on each channel. In general, participants across the groups held negative views of TV1, where they considered it as a to be 'poor quality, a 'government tool', predominantly Malay, and 'boring'. However, the second government Channel, TV 2, was regarded by most of the participants across the groups as more 'liberal' with more programmes aired for viewers from different ethnic backgrounds. However, other ethnic minorities from the Sabah and Sarawak groups claimed that it paid little attention to them, and that a heavy concentration was placed on the three ethnic groups mainly from Peninsular Malaysia, the Malay, Chinese and Indian.

With regard to the commercial channels, in general, participants revealed similar views on TV3 and Ntv7, which they asserted had more interesting programmes and better presentation techniques compared with the two government channels. The second commercial television channel MetroVision was not likely to be accessed by the participants due to the limited area of its coverage. Only a small number of the participants in the focus groups indicated that they watched MetroVision and claimed that its main emphasis was on imported programmes. As for both of the subscription television channels, Mega TV and ASTRO, it was also found that only a small number of participants in this study watched them. Those who did watch based their comments on their favourite programmes available on both channels, which were mainly imported programmes.

6.2.2 Self- identification and sense of belonging to the nation.

It is important to identify people's understanding/perceptions of national identity in order to reveal their perceptions of television and whether it has an impact in shaping the way they perceive their national identity. The components of national identity were identified following the interviews with the focus groups. This section will analyse the importance of these components as the main factors contributing to national identity, and ultimately how this affects viewing habits and people's perceptions of Malaysian television.

This section attempts to extrapolate the set of ideas, values and symbols, in short, the 'language of interpretation' used by the participants of different ethnic backgrounds, to form their sense of belonging to Malaysia. In short, this section aims to describe how participants perceived and talked about self-identification with the nation, thus reinforcing their sense of belonging and further formulating their sense of 'Malaysian National Identity.'

Given the complications and controversies surrounding the NCP (see Chapter 2), it was important to find out exactly how Malaysian citizens/society, namely the young adults in this study understood and associated themselves with a certain set of ideas and symbols. Of importance is and the kind of language they used to express their interpretation of 'national identity'.

To achieve this understanding of how participants perceived and talked about their belonging to the nation, and in so doing formulating their sense of national identity, a set of three questions (Question 2-4, see appendix 6) was designed to gauge participants' opinion of their 'citizenship status', and their understanding of 'the concept of national identity' as well as 'Malaysian culture'. This will contribute to an understanding of the participants' self-identification and sense of belonging to the nation. A key issue here is: what is their conception of the idea of 'Malaysian national identity'?

Given the fact that the notion of 'national identity' and the issues related to it are both elusive and complex, it is not surprising that the results from the focus group discussions produced a variety of ideas and interpretations relating to how the participants understood, identified and associated themselves with the nation. For the purposes of this discussion, results will be presented on the positive and negative interpretations of 'Malaysian national identity', under three sub sections: 'Malaysian Citizenship,' 'National identity' and 'Malaysian Culture'.

Malaysian Citizenship

Positive interpretations:

The positive position, namely in the expression of gratitude, was apparent when participants were invited to talk about their opinion of being a Malaysian citizen. The majority of the participants within and across the groups expressed uniformly positive opinions about being a Malaysian citizen and belonging to the country.

> Rozita: "I feel proud and lucky to belong here because Malaysia is a peaceful and stable country." (Malay-Mixed A, Female)

Among the participants, the notion of a "peaceful' and 'stable' country was closely related to the political and economic, as well as the social aspects of Malaysia. Among the Malay participants, there were views that Malaysia was as an economically stable country. In this sense Azmi, makes a comparison of the stability of the Malaysian economy with other South East Asian countries.

> Azmi: 'Well, for me I am proud to be Malaysian and I am glad to belong here compared with other countries. In Malaysia, we don't have chaos like many other countries in this region (South East Asian Region) especially during the

economic crisis...err currency crisis...but we manage to solve it smoothly.'

(Malay B, Male)

Sengga echoed the idea that Malaysia was different to other societies, this time however because of its social rather than economic stability.

> Sengga: "(...) I feel lucky, because Malaysia is not like any other country in the world. They are constantly fighting because of ethnic problems. But here in the multi ethnic society, we are not facing this kind of problem".
>
> (Indian B, Male)

Besides political stability, another participant in the mixed group pointed out that the absence of natural disasters has contributed to her positive expression of gratitude for belonging to Malaysia.

> Lily: "I feel proud because Malaysia doesn't have natural disasters like other countries such as China, where they always have floods so I feel lucky to belong here". (Sabah-Mixed A, Female)

The idea that the 'nation' of Malaysia is characterized by 'stability' or the absence of 'chaos' also found expression in the way Malay participants articulated the notion of their country as a stable, multi-ethnic society. For one Malay female a key characteristic and something which underpins the 'peace' of Malaysian society was the prevalence of compromise amongst the different ethnic backgrounds.

> Azmah: "Not many countries are like us, we manage to compromise with each other. We are all from different ethnic backgrounds, cultures and religions but we live in peace." (Malay B, Female)

Equally indicative of this sense of the 'unusual' nature of the harmony some participants perceived as existing in Malaysian society were the comments of Jastina, from the perspective of a Punjabi female:

> Jastina: 'Well since I was born here and brought up for 20 years, it is a really interesting feeling I am experiencing. You can see three or more different ethnic communities living in one place...you know ...we have different views and perceptions but we still can get along well". (Punjabi A, Female)

As a member of a non-indigenous ethnic group he notes the real differences in 'views and perceptions' that exist between groups but stresses, also, the fact of co-existence. So, among the Malay participants, and some Indian and Punjabi, Malaysia was viewed as an 'exceptional' country. Malaysia was politically, economically and socially stable, but also characterised by a degree of multi-ethnic coexistence, not seen in other multi-ethnic societies. The way in which participants in the Sabah and Sarwak, as well as the Sabah groups, responded revealed another set of positive perceptions about the meaning of being a Malaysian citizen.

For one participant, Ruslan, a participant from Sarawak, comes the assertion that the 'nation' was equated with its laws and constitution' and that citizenship involved avoiding actions which would retard the nations' progress.

> Ruslan: "To me as a Malaysian citizen, we all should show respect and loyalty to the nation...the law and the constitution; ... we should avoid doing anything that will harm the nation, ...corruption, conspiracy...anything that will not contribute to the healthy development of Malaysia."
>
> (Sarawak-Sabah and Sarawak, Male)

Another respondent from the Sabah and Sarawak group, Reza, linked the notion of 'respect' for the law with the absence of 'social conflict'. The law in Malaysia, in his

view, is the cement that binds the multi-ethnic world of Malaysian society. It is the device that secures the solidarity so valued by the participants.

> Reza: "As a citizen of Malaysia, all of us have to respect the laws that were made to prevent us from conflict. If it is for the good of everyone in the country, I think we all should follow the law and the rules".
>
> (Sabah- Sabah and Sarawak, Male)

Thus, the notion of 'being a Malaysian citizen' in some participants is based on shared underlying perceptions, in particular the notion of Malaysia's stability its social peace, and the exceptional nature of this peace. These perceptions are spread across the ethnic groups. Additionally, some participants in the Sabah, Sabah and Sarawak groups linked this peace to the idea of loyalty to the law and constitution.

Mixed Feeling:

In the discussions it was found that there were two accounts in which the participants demonstrated 'mixed feelings' regarding the issue of citizenship. This is particularly evident among Chinese participants. Kawai further asserts that although he has difficulty in identifying with the meaning of being a 'Malaysian citizen', he feels he is somehow still a part of Malaysia:

> Kawai: It somehow feel that this is not my country, but this is not to say that I am from China. Deep inside me, I am still a good Malaysian, I really feel a part of this country. Although I am Chinese, I don't feel that I have any connection with China... it is difficult." (Chinese A, Male)

This expression of mixed feelings was continued by other participants in the sense that they appreciated being Malaysian citizens although there were some aspects of the situation that they were not satisfied about:

> Richard: " I am pretty happy to be Malaysian, basically, minus all that not so good stuff by the government, you know too much propaganda...I am pretty happy because it is safe and there's no war here. In Malaysia we've got everything; it is enough for us, I've got my place at the university, I've got lots of friend, I've got enough to eat, and a place to stay, so I am pretty happy."
>
> (Chinese B, Male)

Similarly, Lim Seng commented on the same basis:

> Lim Seng: " It is great to be Malaysian because even though the government has some weaknesses ...in terms of policies, sometimes, which only benefit some of the citizens, in certain aspects the government still provides all kinds of essential facilities such as cheap university fees in comparison with other private universities." (Chinese B, Male)

Negative interpretation:

The positive statements from participants were matched by a range of less positive articulations of a 'sense of Malaysian citizenship'. Amongst the Sabahan, Sarawakian and Chinese participants, a standard response was the expression of lack of understanding and 'mixed feelings' or 'distance' from the idea of having Malaysian citizenship.

In response to the question "What does it mean to you to be a Malaysian citizen?" one participant in the Sabah group said he was 'blank' and could not think of anything. Similarly one female Sarawak participant stated, "I am completely 'vague', I don't know what to say". These responses could simply indicate a lack of understanding of the

meaning of being 'a Malaysian citizen' to them. Indeed, this kind of response was encountered amongst other participants in the Chinese groups, which could indicate a sense of distance from the idea of 'Malaysian National Identity'. One exchange between the Chinese male and the moderator illustrates this:

> Chia Cheng: "Honestly, I don't feel anything (Laughter)".
>
> (Chinese B, Male)
>
> Moderator: "Would you like to explain more?"
>
> Chia Cheng: "I don't know but I don't think I feel any Malaysian identity. I don't know about others". (Chinese B, Male)

The laughter in this context indicates both the humour of the response, and the unorthodox nature of the view. This view is reflected in Chia's defence of his lack of feeling. He uses the term "honestly' to indicate that he is being true to his feelings, not provocative. He also covers himself from criticism by indicating that he expects others to think for themselves: "I don't know about others."

From other participants in the Chinese groups, one particular response suggests the 'alienated' and 'confused' feeling of being a Malaysian citizen.

> Beng Cheong: "I sometimes feel I am a bit alienated from this country... how can you expect us to identify with a sense of being Malaysian if the government is concerned only with the projection of 'Malay' identity?
>
> (Chinese A, Male)

Fu Ying, another participant in the same group, extended the discussion about China.

> Fu Ying: "Malaysia is our only country. If we go back to China, they don't accept us." (Chinese A, Female)

Fung Ying's statement reflects the idea of the historical background of Chinese migration from China to Malaysia some time ago. Her opinions also suggest that she has disconnected herself from China and considers Malaysia is where she should belong.

So, in general, results within and across the groups show contradictory points of view between the appreciation and uncertainty about the idea of being Malaysian citizens.

'National Identity'

Positive interpretations:

Continuing the themes in respect of 'sense of belonging and identity formation' in Malaysia, participants were invited to express what they understood by the concept of 'national identity'. They were asked When you hear the word national identity, what comes across your mind?' In the researcher's view, this question received a slow response in most of the focus group discussions. To illustrate this, a statement by Jayanti indicate some uncertainty: "I know, I've heard this before, in primary school, but I never actually know what it really means".

In responding to the question, participants within and across the groups used different ideas to describe the meaning of national identity. Most participants demonstrated that they had an 'awareness' of the concept. Billig (1995: 37) has noted that "national identity is not only something which is thought to be natural to possess, but also something natural to remember". He demonstrated this idea with examples provided by Condor (in Press), "Rarely, if asked which is their nationality, do they respond 'I've forgotten' although their answers may not be quite straight" (1995: 37).

In general, the discussions on participants' understanding of the concept of 'national identity' revealed two conflicting views, which are again grouped into positive attitudes and negative attitudes towards the idea. The majority of the participants across the Punjabi, Sabah and Sarawak, and some Malay groups, correspondingly regarded the integration of various ethnic backgrounds as an important factor when talking about their understanding of 'national identity':

> Navshier: " Malaysian". (Punjabi B, Male)
>
> Moderator: "Would you like to explain more?"
>
> Navshier: "Different ethnic group. We have Malay, Chinese, Indian, Punjabi, and so on". (Punjabi B, Male)
>
> Jastina: "I think that says it all, about 'national identity".
>
> (Punjabi A, Female)

The notion of the multi-ethnic nature of Malaysian society was also shared by another participant in the Sabah and Sarawak group, she demonstrated her sense of pride when connecting the harmonious relationship of different ethnic backgrounds with her understanding of the concept of 'national identity'.

> Shafiza: "National identity for me is the integration between different ethnic groups in this country. It is something for us to be proud of, and for me, it shows the national identity of our own country".
>
> (Sarawak-Sabah and Sarawak, Female)

Kavita, a participant in the Punjabi group, asserted that the notion of the multi-ethnic composition of Malaysia, is a plus point for the nation. For her the different ways of life in the multi-ethnic society play a crucial part in her understanding of 'national identity'.

Kavita: "There is something different about Malaysia; we are a multi-cultural society, with different cultures, religions and languages and we all have our way of life, so...the differences that we have among us make up something unique and that is the picture of 'national identity' in Malaysia".

(Punjabi B, Female)

For Azmi, national identity should recognise and embrace various aspects of the different ethnic backgrounds, rather than concentrating on one aspect of one particular ethnic group.

Azmi: " The description of 'national identity' should not focus on only one ethnic group; to me 'national identity' should be the mixture of the different cultures and religions of Malays, Chinese, Indians, Punjabis and everyone in Malaysia. That is itself the identity of Malaysia." (Malay B, Male)

The prevalent view among the participants in the Punjabi, Sabah and Sarawak and Malay groups is that the 'concept of 'national identity' for them is rooted in the composition of the multi-ethnic society of Malaysia. Whilst recognising the importance of the multi-ethnic society when talking about their understanding of the concept of national identity, other participants in the focus group discussions tended to use what Billig (1997) claimed as a 'universal code of nationality', such as the recognition of a national anthem and national flag. Similarly, Heidt (1987) asserted how these elements have been used to forge the national identity of a country.

"In order to establish national identity as the accepted superordinate one and as having over lesser as well as transnational identities, the label 'national' is attached to collectives, institutions, events etc. from national church and national culture, the national trade union congress to the national historical heritage and many more" (1987: 133).

However, the association of the concepts of 'national identity' and 'national code' was most apparent among Malay, Indian and participants from Sarawak and also Sabah in mixed group. Some participants in the Malay groups, for instance, identified the importance of the Malay Culture, the Malay Language and the Islamic Religion, formulated under the National Culture Policy (1971), as their basis for identifying with the concept of 'national identity'.

> Ahmad Nabil: "Well, for me, National identity is about language... our national language and our national culture." (Malay A, Male)

Although in the first response from Ahmad Nabil the notion of 'our' was expanded by him by implication to include ethnic cultures other than the Malay, when questioned further he revealed his interpretation of this more specifically.

> Moderator:" When you say our national language and national culture, what language and culture would that be"?
>
> Ahmad Nabil: "... well our national language is the Malay language and our national culture is everybody's culture, but for me it has to be Malay culture. When we have our own language and own culture, it shows how we are different from the rest of the world, and that is to have national identity."
>
> (Malay A, Male)

The main focus of Ahmad Nabil's opinion still centres on Malay dominance in representing 'our' language and culture, which he claims as a unique identity and as different from other parts of the world.

Ruslan one of the Sarawak participant points out the importance of Malay language as a medium for interaction between different ethnic backgrounds within Malaysia.

Ruslan: I am proud of our national language, and beside, it is the language that helps us to interact with each other, you know from different ethnic backgrounds." (Sarawak-Sabah and Sarawak, Male)

So, some of the participants from the Malay, Sabah and Sarawak groups understood the concept of 'national identity' in terms of language, particularly the importance of a 'national'- namely the Malay-language.

Responses from the Indian and mixed groups revealed a different set of positive understandings about the concept. As well, the discussions centred on the basic principles underlying the NCP as participants in the Indian and mixed groups, indicated a uniform interpretation of their understanding of national identity. In general, they commented that the National Anthem would be one of the many things to associate with the concept of national identity. These comments can be related to Sergei Mikhalkov (1993), where he makes a connection between national anthem and prayer. He claims that "an anthem is a prayer sung by a people worshipping their country and every nation must have this prayer" (cited in Billig 1997: 86). Other participants pointed out school routine that has embedded within it the significance of the national anthem, as one Indian participant in the mixed group put it:

Malina: "You know in school, during the assembly, we were asked to sing the song, *'Negara Ku'* (My Country/ Nation). So, for me it is an important idea to understand national identity." (Indian-Mixed B, Female)

In contrast, other participants in the Indian group commented that the National Anthem has no importance in the concept of national identity because it has become a routine, and has therefore lost its significance:

Jayanti: "In school we used to sing this song, every week during assembly, I don't really feel any patriotic feeling about it, it is just the duty of all the pupils in school to sing this song during assembly." (Indian B, Male)

Besides the importance of the National Anthem, other participants within these groups also noted the significance of the National Flag when discussing the subject. Lily, representing Sabah group, equated the term 'national identity' with a 'sign'.

Lily: "The flag is important, it is a symbol for every country in the world, in an international setting, for example in sports, they normally use a flag to introduce the country". (Sabah- Mixed A, Female)

Results from the focus group discussions found further accounts from two participants, one representing a Chinese and one Punjabi group. For both participants, their interpretation of 'national identity' centres on the importance of the 'place' where they were born. Their discussions on this issue reveal that they have a strong sense of attachment to the nation state. For Fung Nee, a participant in the Chinese groups, citizenship status was linked with her understanding of the concept of 'national identity':

Fung Nee: " For me, national identity is about being Malaysian".

Moderator: "Would you like to elaborate on that?"

Fung Nee: "Because I was born here, I live here and probably, I'll die here and that is why I said I am Malaysian". (Chinese B, Female)

Similarly, another participant in the Punjabi groups, Navshier, demonstrated a strong attachment to Malaysia.

Moderator: "When you hear the word 'national identity, what comes to your mind?

Navshier: "Being Malaysian, this is the place you were born and brought up, the place where you are from and more than that, it is a place called home".

(Punjabi A, Male)

Negative interpretations:

The negative perceptions of the concept of 'national identity' were most apparent in the Chinese groups and amongst participants in the Sabah and mixed groups. For the majority of the participants in the Chinese groups, there is an indication that there is a lack of understanding about the concept of national identity, which is also reflected in some comments concerning 'Malaysian citizenship'. One male participant, Allan, in the Chinese group states: 'I am confused". Another participant Wai Tam, makes a similar response, but this time asks the moderator to explain what is meant:

Wai Tam: "I don't understand what 'National Identity' is. Could you explain that to us?" (Laugh) (Chinese A, Male)

Moderator: "Well, I was hoping to hear from you, I'll take any response as an answer. In this session, there are no right or wrong answers, I am interested in all kinds of feedback on the questions".

Other participants in the groups asserted that the lack of understanding of the concept of national identity was due to the fact that participants were not used to expressing their ideas.

Brenda: "I've never thought about it before (laughter). We are not used to expressing ourselves." (Chinese A, Female)

For Kawai, the notion of 'national identity' is the term that is taken for granted by him. Thus, he asserts:

Kawai: "I never thought about it before because it is only natural in a multi-ethnic society to feel that we have 'a national identity', but I never thought of its meaning". (Chinese A, Male)

The lack of understanding about the issues was also observed in the response from other different backgrounds.

Malina: "National identity is still blurred". (Indian -Mixed B, Female)

Some participants from Sabah groups gave the same responses:

Phil: "No idea" (Sabah, Male)

Steve: "Me neither" (Sabah, Male)

Harry: "No idea" (Sabah, Male)

So, the responses of the majority of the Chinese participants, and of some Sabah and Indian participants, revealed a lack of understanding of the concept of national identity. Moreover, to a certain extent, they thought it was natural to possess it without understanding its actual meaning.

'Malaysian Culture'

As previously discussed in Chapter Two, there has been a tense debate between different ethnic groups over the issues of Malaysian culture and the development of nation-building in Malaysia. The three basic principles underlying the policy: recognition of indigenous cultures, namely Malays, to embrace 'suitable' elements of other ethnic groups and Islam to be given central role, have all proved problematic.

In describing the concept of Malaysian culture across the groups, participants revealed two prominent ideas, which have been categorised as 'Shared culture' and 'Dominant Culture.

Shared Culture:

The majority of participants from the mixed groups, Indians, Punjabis, Sabah and Sarawak revealed a common approach in talking about the issue of Malaysian culture. Unlike some of the participants in the Malay and Chinese groups who were very definite about their opinions, participants in the mixed groups demonstrated their tolerance in expressing their views. Results from the focus group interviews suggested that they came to some agreement on the multi-ethnic nature of Malaysian society. This covers their religions, costume and festive celebrations.

> Chan: "Festivals and celebrations of the different races... open house during 'Hari Raya' (Muslim festival), Chinese New Year (Chinese Festival) and Deepavali (Divali). It shows the integration between all Malaysians and Malaysian cultures." (Chinese-Mixed B, Male).

> Kavita: "Festive seasons, we have all kinds of celebration, from 'Hari Raya', 'Chinese New Year', Deepavali, Vasaki and Christmas."

> (Punjabi A, Female)

What is apparent form the views of Chan and Kavita is their notion that everything centres around the festive celebration of the dominant groups. Their comments, consciously or otherwise, ignore the recognition of minority festivals, particularly Sabah and Sarawak celebrations. Results from the focus group discussions show that on only one occasion did a participant, Bala, an Indian participants in the mixed group, note the importance of other minority festivals of the Sabah and Sarawak communities. In his observations on Malaysian culture he states:

> Bala: "Malaysian culture is about, national festivals, every ethnic group has its own celebration, for example 'Dayak', 'Gawai' (Sabah and Sarawak festivals),

Thaipusam (Indian Celebration) and so on....festivals for all ethnic groups.'

(Indian- Mixed A, Male)

Apart from this kind of acceptance, both integration and respect for each other's values and beliefs, were also mentioned. The whole idea of respect and unity was consistently expressed throughout the discussion groups of mixed participants who stressed the point on many occasions. In conclusion, participants in the mixed groups were seen to demonstrate great tolerance when discussing this issue.

Rozita: "For me respect for each and every ethnic belief and religion reflects the culture of Malaysia." (Malay-Mixed A, Female)

Danny: "Yes, and also the integration of every ethnic group."

(Punjabi-Mixed A, Male)

Rita: "As for me, when you talk about Malaysian culture, the first thing I'd say would be the variety, equality and integration of this multi-ethnic society. It is unique, colourful and something very different".

(Sarawak-Sabah and Sarawak, Female)

For one participant in the Chinese groups, following festivals in Malaysia by public holidays is seen as one of the ways of practising democracy in Malaysia.

Beng Gee: "Festival days and all of these festival days are declared public holidays. This proves that the Malaysian government is equal".

(Chinese B, Male)

Dominant Culture:

Participants in the Malay groups appeared to be more optimistic in describing their understanding of 'Malaysian culture'. Most participants emphasised the domination of the Malay culture and the Malay language in understanding 'Malaysian culture'. According to

them, this is because the Malays are the majority and consequently the concept of 'Malaysian culture' should revolve around the Malays.

> Ahmad Nabil: "As for the multi-ethnic society of Malaysia, if someone asked me about 'Malaysian culture' I'd tell them about the Malay culture, the 'core culture' which existed in Malaysia, a long time ago. That's the main thing. I'd also tell them about other cultures... there are an additional cultures, because there are new cultures." (Malay A, Male)

While some discussions within the Malay groups revolved around the domination of the Malay Culture, a discussion on the subject by participants in the Chinese groups, however, revealed a general disagreement with the statement from the Malays. They claimed that Malaysian culture should not concentrate on one particular ethnic group but should given recognise the culture from other ethnic groups in Malaysia.

> Richard: "Malaysian culture should not concentrate on the majority, such as the Malays and Chinese, because every ethnic group in Malaysia has its own culture and values." (Chinese B, Male)

The notion of 'own culture' was shared by other participants in the same groups. Thus Fung Nee, for example, asserts that:

> Fung Nee: "Every group has its own unique culture and of course every ethnic group would like to hand it down to the new generations...so if I have to explain about 'Malaysian culture' it is a bit hard, because each ethnic culture is different. Own culture was perceived as something valuable for each and every ethnic group, and therefore it is important to preserve this".
>
> (Chinese B, Female)

One participant expressed an extreme opinion, namely that an emphasis should be given to accommodate ethnic cultures from Peninsular Malaysia. The reason given was that there are too many other cultures from ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak which have had no part in formulating and understanding the concept of Malaysian culture:

> Lim Seng: "I would like to add something. So, if we talk about Malaysian culture, the main focus will be on Peninsular Malaysia, because they are the majority and meanwhile the Sabahan and Sarawakian are the minorities. Besides there are too many ethnic groups there, I think. It is going to be too complicated trying to include them all, and this, I think, has some implications." (Chinese B, Male)

Another Chinese participant, Wai Tam, expresses his confusion in describing 'Malaysian Culture':

> Wai Tam: "I am totally confused. What is 'Malaysian Culture?' I do not understand. Basically you cannot put a few ethnic groups together and expect them to develop a culture by themselves; there can be no such thing. I mean, the Malays have one culture and we have our culture. If you want to make that into one culture, which one would that be? There is no indication of what a 'Malaysian Culture' might be." (Chinese A, Male)

Conclusion

So, in conclusion, for these participants there was no clear sense of any unified, clear or universally held sense of 'Malaysian national identity' amongst them. However, when the 'positive' views were considered in relation to the 'negative' ones, a variety of interpretations of the notion of 'Malaysian national identity' emerged. As we have seen,

the discussions about the understanding of 'Malaysian culture' were clearly divided between the 'positive' and 'negative' attitudes. This reflects the whole nature of the debate on 'self-identification and sense of belonging' and leads to the formulation of what is the distinctive yet elusive 'Malaysian national identity.'

6.2.3 Television, construction and deconstruction of national identity

The effort of the Malaysian government to formulate a uniform identity became apparent after the ethnic riots in 1969 (see Chapter Two). It introduced a National Culture Policy (NCP) in 1971, with the aim of uniting all Malaysians, which included the formulation of a 'Malaysian National Identity'.

In the NCP Seminar, held in Kuala Lumpur in 1971, television was recognised as an important medium to promote and articulate national unity, thus fostering the formation of national identity in Malaysia (Dol Ramli, 1973: 67). As a result, over the years, television in Malaysia has been 'confined' by the state to making an effort to produce a variety of programmes revolving around the core idea of the NCP. However, since its formulation, it is questionable as to how successful the NCP has been. Its integration within television programmes brought with it all the problematic symptoms that were generic to the NCP in the first place.

The study of television content in Malaysia reveals that the official role of television in fostering national unity and in further formulating a distinctive Malaysian national identity becomes problematic when only a part of its community is given priority. A study by Karthigesu (1990) suggests that uneven programme distribution amongst the Malaysian population with a heavy concentration of programmes for the majority groups only, namely the Malay and Chinese, did not encourage the promotion of national unity among the various ethnic groups in Malaysia.

Similarly, Wang and Mustafa (1996) further assert that the effort towards the positive construction of national identity becomes more problematic when only the ethnic majority, the Malays and the Chinese to a lesser extent are represented on television, while other ethnic minorities, namely Indian and those from Sabah and Sarawak, are marginalised on television. Given the current situation of television programming in Malaysia, the question

is raised as to how the Malaysian audience (the young adults under investigation in this study) interpret and negotiate their articulation of the concept of national identity through programmes/images on Malaysian television.

Results from the focus group discussions suggest that the role of television in constructing and deconstructing the concept of national identity may be usefully divided into two sections.

Firstly, the role of 'television as an institution' which covers responses towards television channels with regard to the distribution of programmes for different ethnic backgrounds, and secondly the role of 'television genres' in terms of the kind of images projected to articulate the sense of national identity among Malaysian audiences.

Television as an institution, and construction and deconstruction of national identity

Since the introduction of television in Malaysia, as previously mentioned, efforts have been made to incorporate a sufficient amount of programmes to satisfy the needs of all the multi-ethnic audiences in Malaysia. However, history has proved that programme quotas among different ethnic backgrounds have aroused the dissatisfaction of other ethnic minorities, namely those of Indian background due to the unevenness of the programme distribution for them (see Chapter Three). This problem is more complicated when television in Malaysia, practises selective representation, which can result in eliminating the representation of other ethnic minorities. Thus this raises the question of how different ethnic backgrounds perceive the role of television as an institution in promoting a sense of 'national identity'. Questions such as "What is your opinion of TV channel in Malaysia in general?' and "Do you think television, caters/provides programmes for all races/ethnic groups in Malaysia?" were asked during the sessions. Participants' responses to the questions were again divided into positive and negative viewpoints.

Positive Opinion:

Positive opinions on the issues mentioned above were expressed in terms of participants' agreement that television provides programmes for uniting the Malaysian population. Discussions on this account were apparent among the Malay participants and to a lesser extent among participants across other groups. The Malay participants uniformly asserted that, in general, television in Malaysia practises a system to accommodate programmes for different ethnic backgrounds through the use of different television channels. For one Malay participant, his discussion on the subject was limited to the programmes available for major ethnic groups, particularly, the Malay, Chinese and Indian.

> Nash: "There is a variety of programmes, on TV 1, TV 2, TV 3, Ntv 7, for all of us to watch".
>
> Moderator: "Would you like to tell me the types of programmes available?"
>
> Nash: "Malay, Chinese, Indian programmes etc..." (Malay B, Male)

Similarly, this kind of response was shared by Beng Gee, from the Chinese group, who pointed out similar views to those expressed by Nash:

> Beng Gee: "I think everyone has a Chance to watch it".
>
> (Chinese B, Male)
>
> Moderator: "Are you saying that television provides programmes for each and every ethnic group in Malaysia?"
>
> Beng Gee: "Yes, there are Chinese programmes, Malay programmes and Indian programmes". (Chinese B, Male)

Another Indian participant commented that effort were concentrated on the allocation of time-slots provided to broadcast programmes for different ethnic groups.

Sita: "Yes, I think television in Malaysia provides for all. There are days and times for each ethnic group. Friday, Saturday and Sunday, there are lots of Tamil and Hindi movies on television". (Indian A, Female)

While comments from the above participants noted a 'democratic' role for television in constructing national identity, a 'positive' response from Rozita, a Malay participant in the mixed group, and Navshier from the Punjabi group, pointed out the tendency of television channels to provide programmes for certain segments of the Malaysian population.

Rozita: "TV 3, TV 2, they have all kind of programmes for all ethnic backgrounds, except Sabah and Sarawak". (Malay-Mixed A, Female)

Similarly, Navshier's response provided the same attitude towards the absence of programmes for ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak:

Navshier: "Yes, television does make an effort to provide programmes for all, But I don't think there are any programmes for the people of Sabah and Sarawak". (Punjabi B, Male)

While Rozita noted that there were no programmes for ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak, one other participant, Ahmad Nabil, provided a contrasting view when his comments acknowledged the efforts made by TV 1 to include programmes for people from Sabah and Sarawak. However, his further comments revealed that the effort made to show programmes for Sabah and Sarawak was highly limited in number.

Moderator: "How about programmes for ethnic groups from Sabah and Sarawak?"

Ahmad Nabil: "On TV 1 only, there is one programme, a documentary. If I am not mistaken it's called *'Sabah'*. It was a special programmes, it was a one of kind of thing. (Malay A, Male)

Similarly, comments made by Beng Gee earlier on about television, namely his view that it does provide programmes for all ethnic backgrounds, had the same implications as above. When he was invited to comment on programmes for ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak, as well as Punjabis, he stated:

> Moderator: "How about programmes for other ethnic minorities, from Sabah and Sarawak?"
>
> Beng Gee: "There are cultural shows, probably once a month"
>
> Moderator:" How about the Punjabis?"
>
> Beng Gee: "May be once in a blue moon." (Chinese B, Male)

The 'limitation' and 'absence' of programmes, especially for ethnic minorities other than the Malay group on TV 1, is because TV 1 focuses only on Malay programmes. Umi Salmah, a Malay participant, echoed this point:

> Umi Salmah: 'TV 1 unlike other channels, has no programmes for other ethnic groups, it only focuses on the Malays.' (Malay A, Female)

Amongst the Punjabi participants there were views that television made an effort to cater for the difference ethnic backgrounds.

> Surinder:: There is an effort made, you see on TV 1, there are programmes for the Malays, TV 2 for the Chinese, the Indians and for us, especially from *'Bollywood'*. We get a chance to watch it." (Punjabi B, Female).

Other participants in the groups, such as, Pretam, asserted that most programmes intended to cater for them came from an imported rather than a local source:

Pretam: "... you see, all the Hindi movies, showed on television, are from an imported source, otherwise, there are no specific programmes for us. I can't recall any programmes for us." (Punjabi A, Male)

As we have observed, the majority of the Malay participants, as well as some participants from the Chinese, Indian and Punjabis, expressed the view that television's role in constructing 'national identity' in Malaysia tended to focus on selected segments of society, particularly there dominant groups such as the Malays, Chinese and Indians. However, other positive responses by some participants in the Chinese and Malay groups also indicated the concentration of programmes for the ethnic majorities in West Malaysia, that is, Malay, Chinese and Indian, with limited programmes for the ethnic minorities of Sabah and Sarawak. It was also evident that none of the Sabahan and Sarawakian participants held positive views.

Negative Opinions:

Those participants who held a negative opinion of the role of Malaysian television in uniting all Malaysia, perceived that television did not provide programmes for all ethnic groups in Malaysia. This was due to the fact that television in Malaysia was only concerned with promoting programmes for majority groups from West Malaysia, of particular interest to the Malays, and that only limited programmes were broadcast for other minority groups. Results across the groups show that all Sabahan and Sarwakian participants within and across the groups, and to a lesser extent participants in the Indian and Chinese, and some participants in the Punjabi and Malay groups, reported the 'uneven' distribution of programmes for different ethnic groups.

Thus, Razak, a male Malay participant, pointed out: 'Programme distribution in Malaysia is very much based on different ethnicity'. Other participants also shared this notion. In

general, the majority of the Sabahan and Sarawakian participants noted that television in Malaysia only focused on the three ethnic majorities in West Malaysia.

> Rita: "Television in Malaysia, normally has programmes for Malays, Chinese and Indians. Television normally broadcasts programmes for the majorities only". (Sabah, Sabah and Sarawak, Female)

Wai Tam, from the Chinese group, also reported the concentration of programmes for ethnic majority. In his comment, Wai Tam shows his awareness of the imbalance of the programme distribution for all Malaysians.

> Wai Tam: "Television in Malaysia, does not necessary cater for all Malaysians. Maybe for us, maybe for Malays, Indias and Punjabis, but there are not many programmes for people from Sabah and Sarawak".
>
> (Chinese A, Male)

The lack of programmes intended for the ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak evoked a critical response from Harry, a male participant from Sabah:

> Harry: " It is not fair." (Sabah, Male)
>
> Moderator: " Would you like to see more programmes for people in Sabah and Sarawak?"
>
> Harry: Well why not? Say Sitcoms from Sabah and Sarawak, since there are already sitcoms in Tamil and Chinese" (Sabah, Male)
>
> Moderator: "If there was a sitcom produced for Sabahan and Sarawakian viewers, would you watch it?
>
> Harry: "Yes, I would." (Sabah, Male)

His statement 'why not? Since there are already sitcoms in Tamil and Chinese' also suggests the wish for the 'equal' distribution of programmes amongst different ethnic groups.

Not only did those of other ethnic backgrounds notice the concentration of TV 1 on the Malays, but within the Malay participants there was also an awareness that TV 1 focussed on them.

Azmi: " TV 1 caters for Malays (Malay B, Male)

Zaid: "It is all Malays' programmes (Malay B, Male)

While the above comments were concerned with the 'dominance' of Malay programmes, another comment revealed yet another interesting point. Chirsty, an Indian participant, noted not only that the focus of programme distribution is on the Malays, but she also pointed out that television has also a tendency to cater to the second largest community, the Chinese, in comparison with the Indian.

Chirsty: "TV 1, does not cater, TV 2 okay, TV 3 okay, there are all kinds of programmes for everyone, but mostly Chinese and only some Indian programmes." (Indian-Mixed A, Female)

Similarly, Pretam and Hardip, participants from the Punjabi group, pointed out that programmes for Pujanbis were also small in number and from imported sources.

Pretam: "Programmes for us, only Hindi Movies." (Punjabi, Male)

Hardip: "Most of it are imported programmes." (Punjabi A, Male)

On the other hand, Allan pointed out that market forces, which are concerned more with making profit than with anything else, drive the choice of programmes targeted on majority groups.

Allan: "Television caters for the majority groups because of commercial values. In order to earn more money, television puts on more programmes for the ethnic majority. The ethnic minority cannot earn money".

(Chinese B, Male)

The way in which other Sabahans and Sarawakians responded to the questions on whether they thought television in Malaysia provides/caters for all ethnic backgrounds, repeated the negative attitudes towards these issues. Steve, a male participant, pointed out that programmes about Sabah and Sarwak were only available at certain periods.

Steve: "You see during election periods, televisions screen a lot of Sabah and Sarawak programmes." (Sabah, Male)

Vennie further asserts that programmes that show ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak are screened only at certain intervals:

Vennie: "Yes, all of sudden, there are lots of programmes about us."

(Sabah, Female)

In the same way, Harry pointed out the hidden agenda behind the portrayal of Sabah and Sarwak during the election period.

Harry: "These programmes were put on to show that the government cares about people from Sabah and Sarawak, but they only care during the election period. As time passes by, these programmes will fade away and eventually, there will be no programmes for us at all". (Sabah, Male)

One Indian participant, Sengga, claimed that the 'air time' slots provided for Indians were inconvenient and only acted as a 'token' to satisfy the Indian community.

Sengga: " Let's say on Friday, they have Hindi Movies on TV 2, but they also have Tamil movies on TV 3. On Saturday, they have both Hindi and Tamil

programmes. 'They condense everything into one. It seems like it's their duty to put on programmes for us. They have to put them on, so they just simply compress everything together". (Indian B, Male)

The notion of limited programmes catering for Indians resulted in strong criticism from another Indian participant, Prekha. Her comments revealed dissatisfaction concerning the amount of programmes provided for the Indians. Jayanti, who called for equal distribution of programmes for all ethnic backgrounds, interrupted the discussion.

Prekha "I feel so irritated. I feel justice is not happening. Nobody is there to correct it. Justice is JUST...ICE". (Indian B, Female)

Moderator: "So would you like to see more Indian programmes on television?"

Jayanti: (Interrupts) "Equality...we would like to have the same amount of programmes as the Chinese and the Malays as well as English movies. Because we are all Malaysian. We are all living under the same roof, called Malaysia but they cater only for Malays,Chinese, (...). There should be a very good of spread of programmes". (Indian B, Female)

Sita connected the limited programmes for Indians with the limited resources for sponsoring programmes for them:

Sita: "There are limited Indian programmes because there are no sponsors for us. Maybe one day we can sponsor ourselves (laughs). Because of 'Babas', 'Linggams', we can watch Indian programmes." (Indian A, Female)

The discussions of participants within and across the groups provided contradictory views on the way television provided programmes for different ethnic backgrounds. References to 'sufficient' programmes and the efforts made by particular channels to cater for every ethnic group were made by those with positive views, particularly amongst most of the Malay participants, and some in the Chinese, Indian and Punjabi groups. Participants from

Sabah and Sarawak did not demonstrate positive views on these issues. The notion of television focusing only on 'dominant groups' was largely a concern to the Sabahan, and Sarawakian and Indian participants, but to a lesser extent to some Chinese, Punjabi and Malay participants.

Television programmes and images, and constructions and deconstructions of national identity

Positive Opinion:

The specific types of images and programmes on television that constructed the participants' sense of national identity are divided into three sub-categories: 'national pride', 'multi-ethnic images' and 'imbalance in reporting' responses. Questions include: 'Do any of the local programmes in television in Malaysia *increase* your sense of being /belonging to Malaysia?', 'Do any of the local programmes, in television in Malaysia *decrease* your sense of being/belonging to Malaysia?', 'Do any of the imported programmes in television in Malaysia *increase* your sense of being/belonging to Malaysia'. 'Do any of the imported programmes in television in Malaysia *decrease* your sense of being/belonging to Malaysia?' In addition the participants were asked: 'As a Malaysian citizen, what do you think television should be doing for you?'

The first section of the discussion centres on participants' responses in relation to their sense of national pride. Poole (1999: 70-71) has equated 'national pride' with the term 'national event' which, he asserts, provides viewers with a specific moral agenda which creates strong motivation for the member of the nation state to take pride in the achievements of their fellow members.

It is evident from the focus groups discussions that television in Malaysia provides viewers with national pride through programmes and images that project achievements by citizens of the country.

In response to the question 'Do any of the local programmes increase your sense of belonging to Malaysia?' participants in general revealed a uniformly positive perception of television images and programmes that dealt with national events as promoting their national identity. Their perceptions centred around three items, namely the 'sporting event', 'national achievements' and 'locality,' i.e. the geographical entity that is Malaysia.

In 1998, Malaysia was given the honour of hosting the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur, one of the biggest sporting events in the world. The event was a great success for Malaysia, as well as the achievement of gaining some medals.

The achievements of the Malaysian athletes made some of the participants across the groups feel proud and honoured. Poole (1999) noted: "The emotion of pride attests to the belief that I share an identity with the athlete or scientist, and their achievement belongs to all who share that identity" (1999: 71). These achievements, according to the participants, helped to boost their 'sense of patriotism' and enhance their 'sense of belonging to the nation'. One male Punjabi, Navshier, asserts that: 'During the Commonwealth Games, our spirits rise to the maximum'. Some Malay participants, Zain and Nash, illustrated their sense of pride and honour with the capability of Malaysia to organise successfully one of the biggest sporting events in the world.

> Zain: "I really feel proud with the Commonwealth Games, anybody who watched the opening ceremony must be feeling proud too, because, it shows that, although Malaysia is a small country, it is able to host such an event, one of the biggest in the world." (Malay B, Male)
>
> Nash: "And Malaysia has done it very well." (Malay B, Male)

For Nash, his sense of honour and pride is felt not only by himself, but by anyone who shares the same feeling as him, to see the capability of Malaysia to host the great event. Similarly, other participants, from different ethnic backgrounds, echoed the feeling of pride about the success of Malaysia in the Commonwealth Games. For Malina, the success was felt not only by her but also extended to the whole of the population of Malaysia.

> Malina: "We managed to do it. I am very proud and the whole nation was proud too, Malays Chinese, Indians, ...everyone in Malaysia."
>
> (Indian-Mixed B, Female)

While some Malay, Chinese, Indian and Punjabi participants express their feeling of pride about the achievement in the Commonwealth games, responses from some of the other participants across the groups relate to other Malaysian achievements in the 'Thomas Cup', a championship similar to Wimbledon but for badminton. For other participants in the Chinese group, the Thomas Cup Championship plays an equally important part in articulating the sense of pride for all Malaysians.

> Wai Tam: "Sports, badminton like in the 'Thomas Cup'. It's really...our national pride was very strong, ...someone goes out there to compete, we...the whole nation will support them." (Chinese B, Male)

Wai Tam's use of 'our' gives some indication that different sections of Malaysian society felt a strong sense of pride and the term 'we' suggests support from whole nation. Danny, a Punjabi male, also echoed this notion of the whole population's pride and support:

> Danny: " Sports programmes. Like in 1992, the Thomas cup. I could see the spirit of being Malaysian. Me and my friends, we all watched the match on television. Even now, I still feel proud. We support out nation. Although we

are at home, our spirit is strong, it is like we were there to support the badminton squad". (Punjabi-Mixed, Male)

Equally, Richard, a male Chinese, noted that the badminton tournament not only evoked in him strong support, but also a strong attachment to Malaysia.

Richard: "I really feel I have a strong attachment to Malaysia...in badminton, I always support Malaysia. If there is sports coverage that shows China versus Indonesia I won't watch. If there is China versus Malaysia, I will support Malaysia." (Chinese B, Male)

His strong 'support ' and 'attachment' are apparent when he asserts that he is only interested in watching sports coverage that involves Malaysia. Moreover, being Chinese has little influence on his support for a team other than Malaysia. This is evident when he refers to 'Chinese versus Malaysia, I will support Malaysia.'

In the analysis it was also found that television's role in constructing a participant's national identity also included another television genre: advertising. According to Holden (2001) television advertisements play an important role in constructing national integration and national identity. Holden (2001: 286) identified three ways in which Malaysian advertisements forge the construction of national identity. The first, he asserts, was the exclusion of almost all foreigners from the context; secondly, providing citizens with a sense of place and locality to which they belong, and, thirdly, weaving political events and ideological messages into an advertisement's text.

In the focus group discussion it was found that some participants across the groups identified with the third strategy of weaving political events and ideological messages into an advertisement text as an important means of constructing their national identity.

A study by Holden (2001: 287) asserts that advertising images on television in Malaysia provide specific references to a sense of pride and belonging, for example, through an advertisement that celebrated a sense of achievement in scaling a mountain. This particular advertisement was aired as a visual simile for the achievement of a Malaysian mountaineering team's successful expedition to the peak of Mount Everest. The reference made by Holden is further echoed by a small number of participants in the groups involved. This emphasises that they felt a sense of pride in an advertisement by the national car manufacturer in breaking into the international market:

> Azmah: "Our national car, Proton, that is a very good achievement. I really feel proud that we can produce our own car. It is internationally recognised. We export loads of them overseas." (Malay A Female)

> Hardip: "The advertisement about our own car, Proton Saga made me feel proud,.. that is an advance in technology and I am proud of it."
>
> (Punjabi A, Male)

The use of 'political events' in television advertisements, particularly during the election period, appeared to be important for articulating national identity. Nash, a participant in the Malay groups, asserts that the advertisement about the independence celebrations provided him with 'emotional senses' and 'values' surrounding Independence Day.

> Nash: 'Like the advertisement by *PETRONAS*, the best advertisement, there is an element of emotion attached to it, like the celebration of Independence Day, show an 'old' style movie, how people those days, celebrate Independent day. In the advertisement, they showed an Indian father and a small child getting up early in the morning getting ready to celebrate the day, riding a bike to the stadium (Refering to National Stadium)... I felt touched, it made me feel...I appreciate the independence that we have." (Malay B, Male)

In speaking about national pride there were also participants who say that it not only comes from sporting or other achievements, but also in terms of locality. Malaysia, being situated on a plateau that is shielded from most major natural disasters, is an 'ideal' place for the growth of a varied range of flora and fauna that provide this sense of pride for Surinder.

> Surinder: "I am glad to belong to Malay, it is safe, beautiful with its tropical rain forest ... you could not ask more ... it is a nice place to be.
>
> (Punjabi A, Female)

According to the other participants, these factors, plus healthy economic growth and political stability in comparison to various other nations, makes them proud and glad to be Malaysian. Sengga, a male Indian participant, illustrates this:

> Sengga: "Compared to other countries, we are a peaceful country, politically we are stable, there's no chaos and the economy is picking up."
>
> (Indian B, Male)

Given the 'prosperity' Malaysia has, it is not surprising that participants identify with the kind of images and programmes that deal with this subject and provide them with a sense of pride and belonging. Participants from ethnic minority from Sabah and Sarawak demonstrated a strong identification with their native place when talking about the kind of images that help to articulate the sense of national identity in Malaysia. The kind of beautiful images of Malaysia featured in local documentaries play a significant role in making them feel proud and attached to the nation:

> Rita: ' Warna-Warni Malaysia." (TV Documentaries).
>
> (Sarawak-Sabah and Sarawak, Female)

> Moderator: "Why do you think it helps to increase your sense of belonging to Malaysia?"

Rita: "Well, It shows the beauty of the country. It gives me a chance to know about my country. And I am very proud to say it is beautiful. I am glad I belong here". (Sarawak-Sabah and Sarawak, Female)

Similarly, Reza, a male participants echoed Rita's view.

Reza: "Majalah 3 for instance and other documentary programmes highlights interesting places in Malaysia, I feel proud and honoured to belong to such a place." (Sabah- Sabah and Sarawak, Male)

In general, participants in all groups also claimed that imported television documentaries, which portrayed natural disasters, unstable politics, and racial discrimination in other countries, provided them with a strong sense of attachment to Malaysia.

Chia Cheng: "I think documentaries sometimes show natural disasters and poverty in other countries. I feel grateful to be in Malaysia. It is peaceful.

(Chinese B, Male)

Sita, an Indian female, noted that although there are some aspects about Malaysia that she is not satisfied with, when comparisons were made with the situation of other countries that are in chaos, she is grateful to belong to Malaysia with its 'better way of life".

Sita: "In documentaries and news about India, there is poverty and natural disasters, but here we are safe. Although sometimes I feel we have not received equal treatment compared to other races, I am grateful to live in harmony and get shelter, food and good education. Not bad." (Indian A, Female)

One participant in the Sabah group, Steve, asserts that television images that project racial discrimination on television have made him feel fortunate to belong to Malaysia:

Steve: "On television, in some movies, the imported ones, they show racial discrimination in the U.S, the whites against the 'Red Indians' and people were

killed violently. I am glad we do not have that kind of problem. I am happy living in Malaysia." (Sabah, Male)

Mixed Feeling:

With regard to discussions about the use of 'multi ethnic images' on television, the present study reveals 'mixed' responses in terms of agreement or disagreement with the projection of multi-ethnic characters as one of the ways to construct national identity. Those who expressed agreement that multi-ethnic projection on television plays an important role in promoting national unity and national identity provided the more positive views. For example, some responses across the groups demonstrate this idea:

Santokh: " Multi-ethnic images are actually the identity of our country".

(Punjabi- Mixed B, Male)

Shafiza: "Some local musical programmes, local singers, show a variety of ethnic groups from Sabah and Sarawak, Malay, Chinese and Indians."

(Sarawak-Sabah and Sarwak, Female)

Participants who observed that 'multi-ethnic' characters played an important role in constructing their sense of national identity asserted that the portrayal of harmonious relations between different ethnic backgrounds on television provided them with sense of 'unity' and 'togetherness' that made them feel 'proud' and 'secure'. Amongst the comments relating to the above statement were those of the participants from the Indian, Sabah and Sarawak groups.

Kunam: "Whenever I see multi-ethnic characters, Malay, Chinese or Indian on television. I feel good' it is nice to see everybody is there".

(Indian A, Male)

Shafiza: "...we can see multi ethnic integration on television, no chaos etc".

(Sarawak-Sabah and Sarawak, Female)

From the discussions group sessions it was also apparent that the portrayal of 'multi-ethnic' programmes and images occurs in a range of television genres, such as local sitcoms, television advertisements and local musical programmes. For some participants, the constitution of' 'national identity' was made through local sitcoms, which portrayed the 'harmonious' relationship between different ethnic backgrounds:

> Norhazni: 'I think comedy (sitcom) shows national identity, for example, in *'Cam ni Cam tu'*, there are three major groups, Malay, Chinese and Indian, so if a foreigner watches this kind of potrayal on television, they will think that, ah, this is Malaysian society, they are united and they can interact with each other". (Malay A, Female)

Norhazni's notion of 'national identity' was in terms of her appreciation of the harmonious integration between the three ethnic groups and her hope that 'others' (foreigners) would share the same experience as herself whenever they see that kind of portrayal on television.

Kavita, another Punjabi participant commented that the 'inclusion' of the character of a Punjabi in a local sitcom *Kopitiam*, was a positive effort that made her feel that the Punjabi group is a part of the Malaysian nation.

> Kavita: "Now you see it is a good effort that Ntv 7 shows *Kopitiam*, there are Punjabi characters among other major ethnic characters. It is good to see that. I hope to see more of us on television." (Punjabi A, Female)

The positive interpretation of local sitcoms was also shared by Jack, from the Indian group, who 'complimented' the accommodation of Indian characters in local sitcoms.

> Jack: "Sometimes I watch sitcoms, and I see Indian characters in it, I think it is a good effort to put everybody there." (Indian B, Male)

However, the representation of Indian characters, among other characters in television sitcoms, was not received well by some other Indian participants. In this sense, Christy claimed that the 'presence' of Indians in local sitcoms has 'superficial' implications when the focus of the story was on the Malay character.

> Christy: "They only put Indian characters in to fulfil their duty...they play only a small part. The center of the story is normally a Malay character"
>
> (Indian-Mixed A, Female)

For one participant, Jayanti, central for fostering national unity and identity was not only the routine projection of multi-ethnic characters, but also the 'nature' of the production which included the use of a 'Malaysian setting'. To illustrate this she describes how the reflection of the 'Malaysian setting' was projected in the way the whole story was presented, despite the use of the English language.

> Jayanti: *"Kopitiam* is a typical one. Because even though they are speaking in English, the gist of the story, the style, the background, everything is typical Malaysian style." (Indian B, Male)

Another participant, Rozita, a Malay participant in the mixed group, articulated the sense of 'national identity' she found in local sitcoms, but stressed the importance of the medium of communication between the different ethnic backgrounds:

> Rozita: "In Sitcom, you get to see Malays, Chinese and Indians together, ...for example in *'Spanar Jaya'*. All of them get along well, their communication is good." (Malay-Mixed A, Female)
>
> Moderator:"What do you mean by their communication is good?"
>
> Rozita: "They interact with each other well, all of them speak Malay, even Steve" (referring to the Chinese character)". (Malay-Mixed A, Female)

Here, Rozita's notion of 'National identity' is anchored by the use of the national language (Malay Language), which in her view plays a crucial role in constructing unity. However, other responses from participants in the Chinese groups gave different interpretations about the use of the Malay language in sitcoms on Malaysian television. While earlier discussion stressed the positive elements, other participants, particularly in the Chinese groups, pointed to 'a hidden agenda' embedded in local sitcoms.

> Wai Tam: "But there is something else about local sitcoms".
>
> (Chinese B, Male)

The same person, when describing the use of stereotypes in local sitcoms discussed the presentation of characters in terms of language use. On this point, Noor Bathi (1996: 155) commented that "...many incidents of race/ethnic stereotyping occur as a consequence of prioritizing humor and this may be seen as a flaw in the effort to promote inter-ethnic understanding". One participant in this study echoed Noor Bathis' findings.

> Wai Tam: "You see...in local sitcoms, *Spanar Jaya*, the Chinese are being portrayed as speaking 'broken Malay language'; people laugh; they think it is funny. In nearly all local sitcoms they are being portrayed like that. They are some of the Chinese who have a good command of Malay language but in sitcoms, it was exaggerated." (Chinese A, Male)

On the other hand, Azmi, a Malay participant, asserted that advertisements provide positive images for interaction between different ethnic groups.

> Azmi: "An advertisement during the festival celebrations, there are different ethnic groups in it. It's an advertisement by *CELCOM*; it shows, two children characters, representing each Malay and Chinese, interacting on mobile phones, It is a reflection of the interaction between the Malay community and the Chinese community." (Malay B, Male)

While Azmi acknowledge the projection of multi-ethnic characters as contributing to uniting and fostering 'national identity' in Malaysia, one response from a participant in the Chinese group, Allan, provides an interesting point in recognising a 'hidden message' underlying the television advertisement:

> Allan: "There is one advertisement during 'the Chinese New Year Celebrations', which shows, a little Chinese girl, she is running in the rain, then comes along a Malay boy and puts a coat around the girl, ...to protect her from the rain, which reflects the important place of the Malays in Malaysia, to protect us." (Chinese A, Male)

Continuing the theme of the notion of 'multi ethnic' images in constructing 'national identity', another television genre namely, local musical programmes, was also discussed by some participants across the groups. Among the Malay participants, there was the opinion that musical programmes contributed to the notion of 'national identity.' On this point, Norhazni, a female participant, comments not only on the acknowledgement of the different ethnic groups that appear in the programmes, but also on the ability of a non-Malay singer who sings a song in the Malay language.

> Norhazni; "There are some musical programmes on television which include singers from different ethnic backgrounds. *HMI-Hiburan Minggu Ini* (This Week Entertainment). Sometimes we see the Chinese singing Malay songs; their pronunciation is good." (Malay A, Female)

However, other Malay participants did not always share the positive perceptions about musical programmes. Other comments about the appearance of different ethnic background singers contain a negative implication. Thus, Nash, a Malay participant, noted that although there were portrayals of different ethnic backgrounds, it was only 'nominal' and a 'hierarchy' existed:

Nash: In *'Bersama TV2'* (Together with TV 2), a musical programme, there are multi-ethnic characters Malay, Chinese, and Indian, but the host is normally Malay; the others are normally guest singers." (Malay B, Male)

Richard, a Chinese participant, also adopted a negative perception. He acknowledged the effort made to promote integration through local musical programmes. These images, however, were only 'tokens' and the focus was still around a particular majority group:

Richard: "There is an effort made by the Malaysian government to promote integration, i.e. in musical programmes but somehow it gives the impression that Malaysia only consists of three ethnic groups. You see in musical programmes, say, there are five people singing, two will be Malay, another two Chinese and one will be an Indian. They put this on to delight the citizens, they show integration but somehow project the kind of idea that there are still such things as majorities and minorities". (Chinese B, Male)

On the other hand, comments from another participant, Tammy, echoed Richard's notion of 'limitation' but this time connected it to the limited period of time when the programmes were shown.

Tammy: "Well, musical programmes, that show singers from Sabah and Sarawak only appear during election periods, after that they don't show them any more". (Sarawak-Sabah and Sarawak, Male)

Whilst most participants refer to the role of television in constructing national identity in Malaysia, some participants (particularly from the Indian and Chinese groups and one participant from the Malay group) assert that, in general, they watched television for entertainment and did not think about other issues. This is illustrated by the exchange of responses from participants in the Chinese and Indian groups.

Prema: "I don't really feel any sense of belonging when I watch imported programmes, I just enjoy watching it. I don't really think about anything else"

(Indian B, Female)

Jayanti: "...and me". (Indian B, Female)

Remy: "I watch TV for entertainment" (laugh) (Indian A, Male)

Similarly, other participants in Chinese group, noted:

Lim: "I watch TV only for entertainment (laugh). So I don't really sense anything (laugh) and I don't think anything else is related".

(Chinese B, Male)

Wai Tam: "I like to watch entertainment programmes, mainly form overseas. They are for entertainment only".

(Chinese A, Male)

The notion that television viewing is only for entertainment purposes was also echoed by Roslina, a female participant. Her discussion again focuses on the role of imported programmes:

Roslina: "I don't really think how imported programmes can increase a sense of belonging ... I normally watch my favourite programmes. That's all".

(Malay A, Female)

On the other hand, one participant, Danny, provided a different view with regard to the role of television. He commented that television plays an insignificant role in his construction of national identity.

Danny: "TV always shows integration, but it is up to us to choose our way of life, it is not TV but us. We decide to integrate; as for me, I have friends from all ethnic backgrounds. It is we who decide, not TV."

(Punjabi-Mixed A, Male)

His comments indicate the importance of the individual's decision in constructing national identity. Television for him has not contributed to the construction of national identity.

Negative Opinion:

Whilst the earlier discussions demonstrated both positive and mixed responses to the role of television in constructing a participant's national identity, the next section presents negative responses on the issue. In response to the question 'Do any of the local programmes on television decrease your sense of being/belonging to Malaysia?' the discussions were centred on 'television news and talk shows' and, to a lesser extent, entertainment programmes.

The discussions about television news brought comment from only a small number of participants in the focus group sessions. This was partly due to the fact that most participants were 'anxious' about expressing their critical opinions about the news. Some of the following statements illustrate their anxieties:

Remy: "This is going to be anonymous right?" (Indian B, Male)

Harry: "You're not going to mention names?, I am just checking"

(Sabah, Male)

Razak: "We might say too many things about the government"

(Malay B, Male)

Wai Tam: "We are free but not free, we are not allowed to criticize anyone"

(Chinese A, Female)

Malina: "Even though we are a democratic country, we cannot simply voice our dissatisfaction." (Indian-Mixed B, Male)

What is evident is the participants 'anxiety' in expressing their views. It is arguably related to the ideological tensions (Zaharom, 2000) underlying the nature of public discourse about the media in Malaysia as previously mentioned in Chapter 4.

Those who expressed negative responses showed a uniform perception in suggesting that local television news in Malaysia played an insignificant role in contributing to the construction of national identity. This was due to the fact that participants perceived television news as under the control of the government of the day and therefore it did not always transmit balanced reporting to the nation. Two typical comments from Remy, an Indian male participant, and Navshier, a Punjabi male participant, illustrate this:

> Remy: "Most television programmes are under the government".
>
> (Indian B, Male)

> Navshier: "The News is completely under the government".
>
> (Punjabi B, Male)

Given the fact that the news is controlled by the government, it is not surprising to see that all the responses about news were tied up with the notion that television news was completely biased in favour of the 'government agenda' in constructing national identity. Santokh, a male Punjabi participant from the mixed group, asserts that television news is all about government propaganda.

> Santhokh: "What else is there on the news? It's all about the government. It is always the case." (Punjabi-Mixed B, Female)

Some participants in the Chinese and Indian groups gave similar opinions, and they noted further that it has become natural to see television news bulletins promoting the interests of the government. She asserts:

Fung Nee: "It is normal to see television talks about government."

(Chinese B, Female)

Remy:" News, always about the government...all the time".

(Indian B, Male)

A heavy concentration on promoting the ideology of the ruling government has resulted in participants regarding television news as delivering 'unbalanced reporting'. The focus has always been on the government's political agenda, thus providing little space for alternative views. For example, as Umi Salmah asserts:

Umi Salmah: We are a democratic country, but we only see one side of the news, the government's, that's all. It would be nice to hear other views as well." (Malay A, Female)

Umi's opinion that television news only provides 'one sided' news was shared by other participants in the Indian groups. They also commented on the 'good' and 'bad' images in the news coverage between the government and the opposition:

Subadrom: "In the news, you see the government is always a hero, the others are the enemies." (Indian A, Male)

Moderator: "Would you like to tell me who are the others?"

Subadrom: " The opposition". (Indian A, Male)

Here Subadrom's 'always a hero' refers to the way a 'good' image of the government is projected on the news. Meanwhile 'the others' he refers to, namely the opposition, has always been shown as having a 'bad' image on television news.

Similarly, another participant from Sarawak, Masri, asserts that the positive 'stereotype' or good image of the government is promoted through the announcement of the government's projects and policies:

> Masri: "News about the government is all the same. Everything is about telling us what the government is doing, projects, policies, all the good things".
>
> (Sarawak-Mixed B, Female)

Masri's opinion about the 'stereotyped' news coverage about the ruling government was echoed by Kavita, a female Punjabi, but she extended her discussions to include the news coverage during the election period.

> Kavita: "I don't really like to talk about politics...you know... but you see normally during the election period there is lots of positive coverage on the government's side and hardly anything from the opposition parties. If there is any news at all about them, it is all negatives". (Punjabi A, Female)

Similarly, another participant in Sabah group, Harry also commented on the nature of news coverage during the election period. He stressed the 'factual' elements of the news.

> Harry: "You see, during the election season in 1995, on the television news, they showed the V.I.P (authority figure) coming to the rural areas and small villages. Actually that happens only once in a blue moon or once in every five years, when there is an election. If this is the case, television, may as well don't show this kind of coverage at all". (Sabah, Male)

Harry's comments indicate that he regards the news as 'superficial'. His comments make the claim that news coverage during the election period did not provide a true and balanced picture. This is clear from his comment: "Actually that happens only once in a blue moon or once in every five years, when there is an election".

The idea that television news is only concerned with the government's 'facts and propaganda' also resulted in the participants questioning the credibility of the news. The reasons given for their suspicions about television news were related to censorship. On this issue, some participants Indian and Chinese groups voiced frustration about the way local news is presented.

> Remy: "We expect to get real news from television, but we only get the censored version". (Indian A, Male)
>
> Moderator: "What do you mean by real news?"
>
> Remy: "The truth." (Indian A, Male)
>
> Beng Gee: "We should be given correct information, not have things hidden away, the news only shows half of the story." (Chinese A, Male)

Remy's opinion illustrates the 'lack of trust' in television news. Thus it is apparent that he anticipates getting 'real' news, which he equates with the 'truth'. However, he has been disappointed to see only the 'cleansed' version of the content on the television news. The assertion that news on television in Malaysia was only 'partly truth' has also resulted in doubt about its credibility.

> Subadrom: "News, they won't show what's really going on, ... the other political viewpoint. We really don't know." (Indian A, Male)

The question of credibility was raised when participants compared the content of the local and imported news. In this study, two accounts were found where participants made a comparison between local news coverage and foreign news coverage. Remy, an Indian participant, noted that foreign news is more 'trustworthy', due to the fact that in practice there is a more 'liberal approach' in presenting imported news.

Remy: "In the overseas news, they have more freedom, for example the Clinton case,we got to know the truth." (Indian A, Male)

Other participants in the Malay group shared the belief that foreign news has a more balanced content. Azmah illustrated this further:

Azmah: "The overseas news shows the truth; they don't hide things away. For example in the Clinton case, the whole truth." (Malay A, Female)

While, in general, participants exhibit positive views on the nature of imported news, the analysis also found that there were only two accounts that show contradictory views about foreign news. The two views came from Malay and Punjabi participants:

Ahmad Nabil: "...but if foreign news is reported ... something which is not true about Malaysia, I feel a bit upset." (Malay A, Male).

Similarly, another participant in the Punjabi group expressed a related view, but this time he made a comparison in the coverage of 'good' and 'bad' images of Malaysia being presented by foreign news:

Sosch: "Well if foreign news shows good images about Malaysia I feel honoured, but on the other hand, if it shows the opposite ... I feel very angry, especially when the truth is being distorted". (Punjabi B, Male)

While earlier discussions showed that participants, in general, show a high regard for foreign news, it did not work the same way for Sosch. In effect, he is 'sceptical' about the way foreign news provides a 'distorted' image about Malaysia.

It was also evident that, the perception that imported television sources provides more freedom of expression also related to other television genres, such as 'talk show' programmes:

Chia Cheng: "In the imported talk show, 'David Letterman' we get to see how they criticise the government, but here everything is totally pro government."

(Chinese B, Male)

One account commented on the limitation of freedom of expression on local television talk shows:

Wai Tam: "Ntv7, when they first started, they were very good, there is one programme I really like, 'Date Line' (Talk Show). The interviewer, what's his name, Khairi, was really good. He put both the government figures and the opposition figures, and let them really talk. Then he got 'Yank out'. They put on another person, a female, she was not interesting, she talked too much and furthermore she was pro government. It wasn't interesting any more. But during Khairi's time, it was so interesting. The opposition would say one thing and the government would answer, we got to hear alternative... additional views, but later on, maybe the government changed it; it was not interesting any more". (Chinese A, Male)

Underlying the interesting programme for Wai Tam was 'freedom of expression' on television programmes. He values the idea of 'freedom of expression' because it provides him with alternative views that he regards as more 'informative' than 'stereotype views' from the government. Continuing the discussions on the 'freedom of expression', participants voiced their dissatisfaction about the way 'censorship' is applied to television:

Chirsty: "On television, anything which is not in favour with the government means, censored. We can only be given what they want us to hear."

(Indian-Mixed A, Female)

Prema: You see it is really irritating. There is too much censorship on television. It is in almost every single thing. (Indian A, Female)

For another participant in the Punjabi group, she points out that to some extent the censorship measures being applied on television in Malaysia do not make sense.

Jastina: " I feel funny, if a documentary about an animal also involves censorship (Laugh). What for? I don't really understand". (Punjabi B, Female)

Similarly, Azmi acknowledges the limits of local programmes in comparison to imported programmes.

Azmi: "Well, imported programmes are more free, they can really express lots of things ... but in Malaysia, everything has its limitation". (Malay B, Male)

Conclusion

Above all, the role of television in constructing a collective sense of national identity is a complicated one. It appeared that for the majority of the Malay participants, there was a strong sense that television plays a positive role in promoting a sense of national identity. They typically claimed that there was a 'fair distribution' of programmes for various ethnic groups, an adequate projection of multi-ethnic characters from Malaysian society in those programmes, and that television was helping to promote a sense of pride and locality. Some of these views were also shared, to varying degrees, by some of the other participants. Much more typically, however, many of the participants from ethnic minority groups expressed their disappointment regarding the way television deals with programmes for non-Malay groups. In many ways they feel their existence has been marginalized, and to a certain extent they feel television in Malaysia does not provide alternative spaces for a more democratic understanding of national identity. With regard to foreign factual programmes (news but also talk shows), in general the majority of participants within and

across the groups demonstrated positive views. Many mentioned that there was 'more freedom of expression', and that these programmes were more 'trustworthy'. Many of the participants stated negative opinions about local factual programmes, especially with regard to the issue of 'stereotyped views'. On the other hand, in the analysis there were two alternative accounts, one from a participant from the Malay group and one from the Punjabi, which expressed a sense of scepticism and disappointment about the way foreign news portrays images of Malaysia. As noted, however, some participants insisted that television did not contribute to promoting a sense of belonging due to the fact that their watching activity was only for purposes of entertainment. It is evident that the different participants from within and across the groups have demonstrated a wide range of opinions on the issues surrounding the role of television in constructing national identity.

6.2.4 Television stereotypes and national unity

This section examines the discourse of stereotyping on Malaysian television and how individuals from different ethnic backgrounds talk about the portrayal of 'themselves' and 'others' on Malaysian television. It investigates ideas that are used to describe 'themselves' and 'others' on television before examining how these perceptions contribute to an understanding of the role of television in forging unity among multi-ethnic audiences, thus formulating the 'Malaysian National Identity'.

As previously outlined, the 'official role' of television in Malaysia in fostering unity is in doubt, mainly because television is largely concerned with promoting only a few facets of Malaysia's multi-ethnic society, whilst diminishing others. In addition, Noor Bathi (1996) has observed that while the majority of ethnic groups, namely the Malay, Chinese and Indians, receive ample portrayal on television, their images have been highly stereotyped according to their ethnic backgrounds. Stereotypical images have been largely concerned with the socio-economics of the particular group.

Devine (1989) described a stereotype as a shared cultural description of social groups. This cultural description, Katz and Braly (1935) assert, is a 'conventional label' used by others to describe the different characters of ethnic and national groups (cited in Billig, 1995: 80). In Malaysia this 'conventional label', situated within social, economic and cultural divisions, is largely used on television in portraying images of different ethnic backgrounds, particularly in local drama and sitcom.

Studies by Wang and Mustafa (1996) and Noor Bathi (1996) further reveal that the content of local drama does not reflect the multi-ethnic dimensions of Malaysian society. This is due to the fact that Malay and Chinese drama largely deals with issues only concerning one particular ethnic group. They conclude, therefore, that homogenous casting and focus on one particular ethnic group does not encourage the promotion of inter-ethnic relations in

television dramas and thus does not promote interaction beyond one particular group. In addition, they claimed that the humour derived from sitcoms, encourages the stereotyping of ethnic minority characters. Given this situation in television programming in Malaysia, the question can be asked as to how the Malaysian audience (the young adults under investigation in this study) interpret and negotiate their articulation of the concept of national identity through programmes/images on Malaysian television. This section investigates the issue of stereotyping on television, and how people from different ethnic backgrounds talk about the portrayal of 'themselves' and 'others', and whether these images contribute to national unity, and thus create the notion of 'national identity'.

In looking at how participants respond towards 'their' images, and images of 'others' on television, what is prevalent is that participants in general tend to use 'conventional labels' and 'cultural descriptions of social groups' to describe or characterise themselves and other ethnic groups. During the focus group sessions, participants were invited to comment on how they see 'themselves' and 'others' as portrayed on television. For the purposes of the discussion, the participants' responses will be divided into five sections, each concerning how an ethnic group perceives themselves on television, and also how they perceive the other ethnic groups.

The Malays on Television

The results revealed a difference between the way that Malayas and non-Malays viewed the television portrayal of Malays. In general the discussion is divided between negative and positive aspects of the Malays.

Negative Portrayal:

In general, most of the Malay participants claimed that television in Malaysia tended to give a negative portrayal of them, such as having low moral values and poor character. What is evident from the focus group discussions is that concerns ran high regarding the way television represents female images in particular. These representations, participants claimed, were embarrassing, and degrading, of Malay women.

> Norhazni: "If you look at Malay sitcoms or dramas, we can see most of the women are portrayed as having bad characters. They are normally showed as a seducer, chasing after the money". (Malay A, Female)

Zain another participants, claimed that Malay characters in dramas are often portrayed as failures in family life.

> Zain: "Malays are usually shown as being troubled by family problems, with unhappy marriages and the children who are involved in drug activities".
>
> (Malay B, Male)

The degradation of the Malays on television also extends to other aspects of their lives, such as their having low moral values and failing to follow the teaching of Islam. One participant, Rozita, asserts that if there is a television programme that shows that Malays are successful economically, it often portrays them as having low moral values or experiencing the downfall of moral values due to Westernization. Her views are based on the fact that Malays are predominately Muslim, and therefore have to adhere to the teachings of Islam.

> Rozita: "In some Malay drama, TV shows rich Malays but then their life styles is more into western style, going to a disco...they are influenced by western life styles, this is against the Islamic teaching".
>
> (Malay-Mixed A, Female)

Similarly, other participants commented on the portrayal of the Malay involvement in 'unhealthy' activities. The participants meant that 'unhealthy' activities on television were those activities not concerned with traditional Malay lifestyles. This often involves showing Malays as easily influenced by a Westernised culture.

> Umi Salmah: "The Malays are easy influenced by western values, for example in television advertisement, such as *Coca Cola*, they show, some Malays dancing in public". (Malay A, Female)

In contrast, one participant in a mixed group observed that female Malays from rural areas are shown in a positive light.

> Izat: "In dramas, the Malay women are always portrayed as polite and soft spoken, but normally only in characters who are from the village." (rural area)
>
> (Malay-Mixed B, Female)

When the full range of these views is taken into consideration, it is apparent that there are conflicting portrayals about Malays on television. One suggests that Malays, in general, are incapable of modernisation, whilst the other suggests that they are only suited to staying in rural areas, where their values and traditions are more secure.

Positive Portrayal:

However, when other ethnic groups were invited to comment on the way television was representing Malays, many participants across the groups shared views about Malay characters on television. Indian participants commented that the Malays, in general, receive balanced coverage, particularly when television shows the life of Malay characters in the rural and urban areas. Similarly, one of the participants in the Chinese group also commented that Malays on television appear in variety of settings. She commented:

> Fung: "Malays on television, are shown both living in rural and urban area".
>
> (Chinese B, Female)

One Indian participant commented that the portrayal of Malays in rural and urban areas, was one of the ways of providing a more balanced image. In addition, she also made comparisons with the way television chooses to portray the Indian community, which largely centres on rural areas:

> Prekha: "There is a balanced portrayal of the Malays, television show that they live in rural and in urban areas, I think that it is right and accurate. Not like us, we are normally shown to as living on the 'estate' (rubber plantation) This is not true; there are also Indian people who live in urban areas... but television normally shows us only in 'estates'... that's horrible". (Indian B, Female)

There are also views, that Malays are normally portrayed as living in urban areas, and as having a successful life with high social positions.

> Lim Seng: "The Malays are normally shown as being involved in the corporate world". (Chinese A, Male)

Similarly, another participant, Allan, echoed the same views, when he talked about the portrayal of the Malays on television, particularly in local dramas.

> Allan: "Yes definitely, in Malay dramas, they are all very successful". The characters are normmaly reflects the positive image.
>
> (Chinese, B, Male)

The notion of the positive portrayal of Malays was extended to include their social and leisure lifestyle. One Indian participant in the mixed group commented:

> Malina: "TV, normally Malay dramas and movies show the Malay people as an upper class people, they have a modern life style, we also see them wearing nice cloths and having good jobs in a nice company."
>
> (Indian-Mixed B, Female)

One of the participants from the Indian group commented that Malays on television were represented as being progressive, developed and moving forward with the times.

> Kunam: "Malays are normally shown as having a high position at the work place, they are always bosses in most offices... you see the Malays progressing and getting better and better; they are also into a corporate world".
>
> (Male, Indian A)

Other participants from the Sabah and Sarawak group had also noticed this positive representation of Malay characters, and claimed that these images have raised the status of the Malays as an ethnic group:

> Rita: "The things about the Malays are all the good things, all the good values; that they are successful and that is why television normally shows that they are respectable characters in comparison with other characters from other ethnic groups". (Sabah-Sabah and Sarawak , Male)

So, in conclusion it was evident that the majority of the responses with regard to the projection of Malay images were divided into two principal views. The majority of the Malay respondents asserted that their images were highly stereotypical and negative. The majority of the participants from different ethnic minority backgrounds contradicted this view, and asserted that television, most of the time, gave a positive image of the Malays.

The Chinese on Television

The Chinese are the second largest population in Malaysia, after the Malays. They normally live in urban areas and are mostly involved in economic activities. Results from the focus group sessions within and across the groups revealed mixed opinions on the way participants perceive Chinese images on television. The discussions about them, for the most part, centred on positive aspects of the Chinese characters. Only a small number commented on negative projections of the Chinese.

Positive Portrayal:

In general, participants within the Chinese groups, as well as Chinese participants within the mixed groups, commented that television in Malaysia most of the time presents their community in a positive manner:

> Fung Nee: "Television drama normally shows the Chinese as rich and successful businessmen". (Chinese B, Female)

The view that the Chinese on television are rich and successful was shared by the participants across the groups. One participant in the Sabah and Sarawak group, commented:

> Tammy: "Normally Chinese are portrayed positively; they are well established in the society and have a successful life". (Sarawak-Sabah and Sarawak, Male)

The notion that television normally deals with the positive aspects of Chinese images was echoed by Surinder. Her comments further extend the interpretation of the positive images of the Chinese on television.

> Surinder: "If you look at The Chinese on televisions, they are usually successful business persons and normally hard working people and very competitive". (Punjabi B, Female)

Similarly, other participants from the Indian groups, commented that the Chinese are usually viewed as successful businesspersons, and referred to them with the term *'taukeh'*.

> Jack: "You see on television, Chinese means *'taukeh'*." (Indian B, Male)

However, the association of luxury items with the Chinese was not shared by one Chinese participant in the same group. He claimed that only those who are really rich and fortunate could afford to have a nice luxury car.

> Chee: "Only rich people have that...In most dramas, you see Chinese are projected as rich, well not all Chinese are rich...I am poor".
>
> (Chinese B, Male)

Other Chinese participants claimed that television, most of the time, did not reflect the reality of their life. One commented:

> Fung Nee: "Television only shows half of the Chinese community, it does not reflect the whole aspect of their lives". (Chinese B, Female)

Similarly, Richard, who agreed with Fung's statement, commented that television only chose to show images of the upper class community and ignored the rest, which in his point of view did not reflects the reality of the Chinese.

> Richard: Television only shows a part of Chinese community, it is mainly center on elite, and in reality there are also Chinese that are poor.
>
> (Chinese B, Male)

For other participants in the Sabah group, television has a tendency to portray Chinese characters as smart and intelligent people. Phil stated:

Phil: "If you look at the Chinese, on television, they are always shown as clever people, successful in their education". (Sabah, Male)

Negative Portrayals:

In contrast, there was little by way of negative comments on the portrayals of Chinese characters. There was only one account that acknowledged the negative representation of Chinese people on television. One participant in the Indian group commented that:

Prekha: "Chinese characters on television are a bit snobbish. They are always concerned about making money and having a luxurious life. They don't really care about anything else". (Indian B, Female)

In short, the focus groups sessions revealed that, in general, participants thought Chinese characters on television were portrayed positively. There was only one account in which an Indian participant regarded television as presenting a negative image of Chinese people.

The Indians on television

Participants within and across the groups displayed a shared perception of images of Indians on television. In Malaysia, local television programmes tended towards presenting Indians negatively. Noor Bathi (1996) asserts that Indian characters on television, particularly in local sitcom and drama, are highly stereotyped. In most cases, they are shown as male, tight-fisted moneylenders (chettier) or female, poor, dis-empowered and dependent.

Negative Portrayals:

All participants within Indian groups, as well as the participants in the mixed groups, expressed their disappointment about the way television presented their image. Some

participants claimed that television normally shows them in a comical light, which they think degrades them.

> Remy: "I want to kill them (Indian A, Male)
>
> Sita: "Television is spoiling our image. They put, an old men singing and acting and wearing funny clothes in striking colours. They portray us as people from the 'estate' (rural area normally associate with rubber plantation area), it gives us bad image". (Indian A, Female)

For another participant, Bala, the kind of images he normally sees on television often brings embarrassment to Indians in general.

> Bala: "It is shame to us for that kind of portrayal". (Indian - Mixed A, Male)

Other participants in the Malay groups also share similar perceptions. One commented that the kind of portrayal of Indians in colourful dresses, singing and dancing, is partly related to their tradition and life style.

> Azmi: "On television I normally see Indians in colourful dresses, singing and dancing...It is probably their tradition...or maybe their culture".
>
> (Malay A, Male)

One female Chinese participant noted the same view:

> Fu Ying: "Local programmes normally shows Indians wearing colourful dresses, singing and dancing. I think imported Indian programmes also show the same thing" (Chinese A, Female)

For another Indian participant, who views the images of Indians in singing and dancing activities as partly influenced by imported programmes from India, thinks that television provides entertainment, but also escapism for viewers.

Kunam: "Television always show, Indian people as singing and dancing. I think it is a form of entertainment and escapism for the audience. This is because, for some Indian people (audience), they have a long day and tiring day, particularly those who work in the estate, so, some singing and dancing would be a relief for them". (Indian A, Male)

The perception of the negative portrayal of Indian images on television also extended to issues of poverty. This is the main theme in local Indian television drama. One female participant commented:

Jayanti: "In drams, televisions always show us a poor character, Lots of children and live in rural area". (Indian A, Female)

Similarly, other participants confirmed the prevalance of the images described by Jayanti, and asserted that it is the nature of television to show their images as such.

Bala: "It is typical, Indians as far as TV is concerned, equals poor and 'estate".

(Indian –Mixed A, Male)

Whilst it is not surprising to see that Indian participants express negative views with regard to the way television is presenting their images, other participants across the groups also provided similar opinions about Indian images they see on television. A Malay participant, Nash, claimed that most dramas generally, show the Indians as being from rural areas and backward communities.

Nash: "Normally in television drama, we see, the Indians live in rural area, they did not develop and always in poverty". (Malay B, Male)

Similarly, other Malay participants revealed the same kinds of perceptions about the negative portrayal of Indian images on television. Their discussions about Indian images extended to issues of poverty and social class:

> Umi Salmah: " The Indian community is most of the time related to low class; images of their occupation have been highly stereotyped by television, where they are largely shows as working on rubber plantations...and as if they have no education, there are backward with comparison to other ethnic groups".
>
> (Malay B, Female)

Other participants in the Indian groups commented that the way television presented them was not positive. Rani, asserted that this kind of portrayal is an encouragement for members of the Indian community to improve their life. However, she regarded the use of negative images on television as being unsuitable.

> Sita: "Indians are always shown on the 'estate', working in horrible place".
>
> (Indian A, Female)
>
> Remy: "Backward images." (Indian A, Male)
>
> Rani: "Maybe the message is to ask the Indian community in the 'estate' to come up and improve themselves, but I think television used the wrong approach. To show all of us in a negative light does not always work".
>
> (Indian A, Female)

Another Indian participant in a mixed group commented that the negative images that she sees on television programmes did not give an accurate reflection of the real lives of Indian communities:

> Chirsty: "You see, local Indian drama is not accurate, this is because they only show the Indian community revolving around 'estate' life, as if there is no

Indian community in the towns or city areas. It really does not show the reality". (Indian-Mixed A, Female)

Similarly, Lim Seng from the Chinese group, also echoes the fact that television does not give a correct representation of Indian life. His response revealed some scepticism for such portrayal.

Lim Seng: "Drama normally shows Indians working in rubber plantation. That's all the kind of images I normally see. I don't think they are a hundred percent true." (Chinese B, Male)

For most of the Punjabi participants, Indians serve as 'token' characters on local television. This opinion was echoed by Hardip and Kavita, and in this respect they also felt that their characters received the same treatment. Furthermore, this projection has political implications in their view:

Hardip: "I think on news, Indian images do not received enough coverage... it is just the way it is. Only during festival celebrations, there will be a bit of news on Indian, I think it has some political agenda." (Punjabi B, Male)

Kavita: "Yes only, during festive celebration, such as Thaipusam, open house an so on not much. Minimal...it is equivalent to the coverage about us". (Punjabi B, Female)

Some participants in the Sabah and Sarawak group commented on similar points, and emphasised that there is hardly any coverage of Indians. The lack of comments from them was due to the fact that they have limited exposure to local Indian programmes, as many of them noted that they prefer to watch imported Indian programmes.

Tammy: "Indian images are rare, only during Deepavali, or in a musical programme, once a week, I think the programmes is *Nada Suara;* that is all I

know. (Laugh) I hardly watch anyway, but I just know from television advertisement". (Sarawak-Sabah and Sarawak, Male)

Shafiza: "...it is very rare to see local Indian programmes. I normally watch imported programmes. I am not too sure whether there are any Indian programmes which are locally produced."

(Sarawak-Sabah and Sarawak, Female)

Another participant in the Sabah group commented that she only knows Indian images that are related to traditional aspects of the Indians.

Vennie: "I only know Indians are related to curries (famous Indian dishes) in their life (laugh)". (Sabah, Female)

Harry: "That is part of their culture (laugh)". (Sabah, Male)

Phil: "...and sari (traditional costume)...especially the newscaster". (laugh)

(Sabah, Male)

The majority of the participants, particularly within the Indian groups, commented that, television tended to give a negative portrayal of Indian minorities. Participants shared this view across the groups.

The Punjabis On Television.

Limited Portrayal:

Given the fact that Punjabi's are one of the minority groups in Malaysia, it is not surprising that all participants in these groups commented that there is hardly any portrayal of Punjabis on television in Malaysia.

Pretam: "...there aren't any images of us on television in general. I don't remember seeing any local programmes specifically for us".

(Punjabi B, Male)

Surinder: "Me too. I don't know. I don't think there is one in Malaysia".

(Punjabi B, Male)

When participants in the Chinese and Sabah groups were invited to comment on the Punjabi characters on television in Malaysia, most of them were unable to provide any comment due to the fact that they did not notice their appearance on television.

Beng Gee: "Honestly, I don't know" (Chinese B, Male)

Richard: "I did not notice them (laugh) sorry!" (Chinese B, Male)

Moderator: 'How about others?"

Participants: (All) "No..."

Similarly, another participant, from Sabah, echoed the same comment:

Harry: "I don't notice their characters that much (laugh)".

(Sabah, Male)

Other participants from different ethnic backgrounds, the Malays, Indian and some Chinese participants, commented on the lack of Punjabi images on television. One participant in the Malay group, Razak, pointed out, that the limited portrayal of the Punjabis on local programmes, particularly in entertainment programmes, is due to the fact that most of the programmes that cater for the Punjabis are imported from India.

Razak: "Nothing much on them on local programmes, but we have lots of films from '*Bollywood*"'. (Malay B, Male)

On the other hand, those participants that noticed the appearance of Punjabis commented that not only do they rarely appear on television, but also if they do appear in a television drama or sitcom they are only given a small part as a 'token' character.

Santokh: "There is one, that I can remember, ... *Kopitiam* But I can remember his name, that guy...got a small part. He played someone sitting and talking in the coffee shop, that's about it".

(Punjabi-Mixed B, Male)

Other Sabah participants commented that efforts to accommodate Punjabi images on local television were more apparent on the latest television network, Ntv7, mainly through clips about Punjabis festival celebrations. Before this television mainly showed the festivals celebrated by other majorities.

Lily: "There is 'Vasaki' festival on Ntv 7, I think that was good effort, all this while, television only show about Muslim celebration or...Chinese and Deepavali, but now Ntv7 make an effort to show 'Vasaki'".

(Sabah-Mixed A, Female)

To a certain extent, some participants claimed that even with limited appearances, television in Malaysia still tends to stereotype their image. It portrays them as a people who have a poor command of the Malay language, as well as having a low-income occupation such as a security guard in a bank, particularly in television advertisements.

Jaswin: "In advertisements, television shows us as big sized guy, with very bad command of the Malay language and stuff like that". (Punjabi A, Female)

Other participants from the Punjabi groups commented that television in Malaysia normally portrays them in their traditional style. The response received from them

concerned their traditional appearance and suggests that there is not enough exposure of ethnic Punjabis on television.

Navshier: "...big guy wearing turban (Laugh)". (Punjabi A, Male)

Tammy: "Punjabis... wear turban that's all ...(Laugh)".

(Sarawak-Sabah and Sarawak, Male)

For one Malay participant, Norhazni, the wearing of a turban for most male Punjabis has cultural and traditional significance.

Norhazni: "It is their tradition, to wear turban, it is their identity, and they conceive it in the way they dress". (Malay B, Female)

Similarly, when the participants in the Chinese groups were invited to comment on the images of the Punjabis they see on television in Malaysia, one participant noted that images of the Punjabis on local advertisements were stereotyped too.

Kawai: "Sinkh in advertisements are portrayed as guards (laughter). You see lots of them in an advertisement about BANKS in Malaysia".

(Chinese A, Male)

On the other hand, there were assertion that, Punjabi image on television in Malaysia were portrayed with the positive appearance. Typical example came from Malay groups:

Akmar: Punjabis are good looking people (laugh). (Malay A, Female)

In conclusion, it was evident that the majority of the respondents across the groups demonstrated limited knowledge about the Punjabis. To some extent, the participants from the Punjabi ethnic background asserted that television in Malaysia showed a tendency to stereotype them.

The ethnic Minorities (Sabah and Sarwak) on television

Seasonal Portrayal:

When participants in the Sabah and Sarawak group sessions were invited to comment on television in Malaysia, all of them voiced negative views regarding the way television deals with their image. Some participants claimed that television provided a minimalist portrayal of them.

> Tammy: "Television did not provide enough exposure of us. When are people going to know about us? About the way we live, and so on. We are just like other people, but I am sure not many of other people know about us".
>
> (Sarawak-Sabah and Sarawak, Male)

Another participant, Jolina, commented that the lack of portrayal has negative implications on the way society perceives them.

> Jolina: "When we arrived here (referring to West Malaysia), some of the people asked whether we still lived on trees.... Well the exposure of Sabah and Sarawak is too little, and that is why people don't know much about us. I feel television should give more exposure to us". (Sabah, Female)

> Lily: "For me, the portrayal of the Kadazan, Iban, or Murut is less compared to other major ethnic, television did not make any effort to show more about us..." (Sabah-Mixed A, Female)

Malina, echoing the view about the lack of exposure for other ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak, makes a comparison between Indians and other ethnic groups on television.

> Malina: "You see, television only shows half of its community. Indians only receive a small percentage, other ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak, sorry, none at all." (Indian-Mixed B, Female)

All of the participants in the Indian groups, when invited to give some comments on they way television portrays images of people from Sabah and Sarawak, were unable to talk much about it. This was due to the fact they barely see their images on television in Malaysia. In this sense, it appears that the lack of their portrayal on television has made them less aware of images of the other ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak.

All: "Not much..." (Indian A)

Jayanti: "Nothing'. (Indian B, Male)

Prekha: " So far, there is nothing about them". (Indian B, Female)

Similarly, some participants in the Chinese group demonstrated a lack of awareness about people from Sabah and Sarawak. They did not respond to the question, or were silent and shook their heads. On the other hand, some of the participants in the Punjabi groups were aware of the images of the other ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak, and commented that they only knew some aspects of these ethnic backgrounds and the lives of these ethnic groups from television.

Chie: "Only their dance, music, but we don't actually know what kind of environment they live in". (Chinese B, Male)

Pretam: "I got to see through some documentary...their dance and music, that's all". (Punjabi A, Male)

One participant, from Sabah, commented that a heavy concentration of other ethnic groups, from the West of Malaysia, has resulted in only a small number of low quality programmes being produced to highlight other communities in the East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak).

Rita: "Most of the programmes, concentrated in the west, made for and shows about people in the west, very little and seldom programmes were made about Sabah and Sarawak". (Sabah-Sabah and Sarawak, Female)

Ruslan: "...in a documentary '*Warna-Warni*' Malaysia...not that interesting though..." (Sabah and Sarawak, Male)

Helena, a Chinese participant in a mixed group, commented that because Sabah and Sarawak people are a part of the Malaysian society, television should make an effort to show images of them on television.

Helena: "They are also Malaysian, and it will be a good idea not to ignore them". (Chinese-Mixed A, Female)

Whilst some of the participants within across the groups have demonstrated their limited knowledge about the images of the different ethnic groups from Sabah and Sarawak, a small number of participants from Sabah, Punjabi and Malay groups expressed alternative views. For them, the portrayal of images of the ethnic minority from Sabah and Sarawak is seasonal in character and has political significance.

Harry: "We do not appear on television, accept during the election period".

(Sabah, Male)

Navshier: "In news, once in a blue moon, basically during the election period, then television will focus on Sabah and Sarawak". (Punjabi A, Female)

Similarly, other participants in the Malay group, and also the Punjabi groups, commented on the same thing.

Nash:" We only hear about them, during election period" (Malay B, Male)

Moderator: "Would you like to explain more?"

Hardip: "During the election period, you get to see some coverage about people of Sabah and Sarawak, in the news especially...". (Punjabi A, Male)

One participant in the Sabah group, Harry, voiced his frustration and disappointment about their appearance on television.

> Harry: "During the election period, in the news especially, they normally show figures of authority coming to visit people in small villages, shaking hands and so on... that is very irritating. Only during the election periods. Other than that, we only appear in some poor quality musical programmes".
>
> (Sabah, Male)

In short, the majority of the respondents from the ethnic minorities asserted that their representation on television was seasonal in character and was accompanied by a hidden political agenda.

Conclusion

What is evident from the discussion above is that, in general, participants in the different ethnic groups have varied perceptions about the kind of images that are being portrayed on television about them. As for the Malay images on television, it is apparent that by and large all Malay participants had a shared interpretation of their images on television, which was dominated by a negative view. These images mainly involve the projection of Malays as having low moral values and of failing to conform to Islamic teaching. On the other hand, those of other ethnic backgrounds tend to contradict this interpretation, mainly by seeing positive portrayals of Malay on television (i.e. as progressive, developed and forward moving characters) as being more typical.

With regard to the Chinese images on television, the discussions across the groups revealed that a majority of the participants tended to view the portrayal of Chinese characters as positive. In general they were associated with rich and successful business ventures. There were one account from Indian participant, who thought that there were images of the Chinese on television connected with unpleasant appearances and snobbish personalities.

The image of Indians on television was widely regarded as being negative within and across different ethnic groups. These images were seen as stereotyping Indians as being mainly related to the comical, poor, backward, or being of a low social class. The Punjabis image were to some extent portrayed positively in terms of their physical appearance, and negatively in the form of their occupation on television. Finally, the portrayal of the ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak were typically seen as negative by all participants within and across the groups. Their presence were seen to be largely confined to appearances at election times, possibly in the service of a hidden political agenda.

- Chapter Seven -

Conclusions

The objective of this thesis was to examine certain key aspects of the relationship between young adults, television and national identity in the multi-ethnic contexts of Malaysia. With the formulation of the National Culture Policy (NCP) seminar in 1971, television was recognised as an important instrument to promote and construct a collective sense of national identity among the population. Since then, the Malaysian government has made an effort to encourage the promotion of national identity in Malaysia, which centres on the core idea of NCP. When television first started in 1963, most of the programmes available on Malaysian television were imported. This was due to the lack of local ability to produce home-grown programmes. Subsequently, the percentage of local programmes has increased, but there has been a tendency for them to be modelled on western genres. Efforts have been made to overcome this problem, but unfortunately the next phase of home-based programmes has often resorted to the stereotyping of all ethnic groups in Malaysia. Arguably, television is a powerful medium, which may have the potential of creating, strengthening and reinforcing a sense of national identity and loyalty to the nation. Assuming that national identity can be shaped by television, the question arises, since the Malaysian government has actively pursued a policy of using television to create and promote sense of national identity, has the implementation of this policy been successful?

The processes of national identity formation are complex and within a Malaysian context they are contested. Thus it is not surprising that in the analysis of the participants' self-identification and sense of belonging to the nation, this study revealed that in general participants did not share a unified sense of 'Malaysian national identity'. It was evident that their personal sense of national identity was divided between positive and negative as

well as mix understandings. For some participants, their national identity is expressed in a positive sense, drawing on their 'life experience' in terms of an appreciation of the composition of the multi-ethnic society of Malaysia. Similarly, those who share these views often expressed their 'appreciation' and 'gratitude', thus indicating a strong sense of attachment to Malaysia for their good fortune in being Malaysian. Political, economical and social stability has been a primary factor leading to some participants feeling a 'sense of security' in belonging to Malaysia. This aspect was shared, to varying degrees, by the majority of the participants, within and across the groups.

The positive interpretation of national identity is also evident in an 'authority-defined' dimension of national identity. The use of national symbols, such as a national flag and anthem, provide a basis for participants to identify with the concept of national identity, particularly evident amongst Indian participants and to lesser extent ethic minority from Sabah. However, it was evident that the use of national symbols for one participant in the Indian groups does not contribute to a sense of national identity. This is because use of the symbols appeared to be so naturally embedded in everyday routines that they had lost their significance. Similarly, none of the Chinese participants regarded national symbols as a contributing factor in forming their sense national identity.

For some participants, what might be described as an 'authority defined' sense of national identity was seen to be based on Malay culture and language. As such, it was regarded as applying only to a selected part of the Malaysian population, that is, the Malays. One Chinese participant called for an acknowledgment of the existence of other ethnic groups in Peninsular Malaysia. While some of the other participants did not recognise the 'dominant idea' as an important aspect in forming their sense of a unified national identity, they called for a more liberal approach with an accommodation for the various aspects of different ethnic minority backgrounds. They wanted to see the promotion of a wider sense of national identity so as to include all members of the multi-ethnic population of

Malaysia. On the other hand, some of the participants demonstrated 'mixed feelings' or a 'lack of understanding' about why national identity was important. Some exhibited no clear sense of national identity at all. Instead they used words like 'duty' or 'loyalty' to describe their relationship to the nation.

Thus it was evident, in the focus group discussions, that a sense of belonging and a sense of national identity amongst the young adults were divided between positive and negative views, as well as mixed interpretations. These findings in many ways reflect the whole nature of the debate regarding the construction of a distinctive Malaysian national identity through the formulation of National Culture Policy.

Regarding the viewing habits and perceptions of Malaysian television, in general, participants revealed distinctive preferences and interpretations. However, the majority of them preferred to watch commercial channels rather than government channels. Their viewing habits were very much influenced by factors such as the perceived quality and the nature of the programmes. Commercial programmes were considered to be 'more entertaining', and to have more variety. It was typically their view that government channels, particularly TV1, were more concerned with promoting the government's ideology, Malay culture and Islam, and were therefore less likely to produce quality programmes.

Audiences in Malaysia have long been influenced by Western genres of entertainment programming, so it is not surprising that the majority of the participants choose to watch imported rather than local programmes. In general, imported programmes were seen to be providing participants with 'interesting sources of entertainment'. Local programmes, in contrast, were seen to be largely low in quality and concerned with promoting the 'national ideology' that has evolved around the core ideas of the National Culture policy. Still, it is the case that local programmes in English proved to be popular among the non-Malay participants. To this end, the assumed linkage between the Malay language and the

promotion of a sense of national identity is challenged, particularly among the Chinese, Indian and Punjabi participants for whom Malay is not their mother tongue. Previous studies by Kaur (1979), Samsudin (1991), Mohd.Nor (1993) and Noor Bathi (1996) suggest that television viewing among Malaysian audiences is decisively shaped by their ethnicity. This conclusion is reaffirmed by this study. At the same time, however, it was also found that the viewing habits of young adults were also based on the perceived 'entertainment value' of different programmes, particularly of the imported English programmes. This aspect acknowledged the importance placed on foreign-sourced programmes on Malaysia television.

When Malaysian television first started in 1963, the distribution of programmes among the multi-ethnic population was regarded as being unequal. There was a greater much concentration on English programmes at the expense of Malay and Chinese programmes. Even worse, Indian programmes were virtually non-existent. Efforts to accommodate Chinese and Indian audiences were made, however, with the introduction of TV2, and subsequently with the arrival of TV3 and other channels. For some of the participants, the greater provision of programmes devoted to those of ethnic minority backgrounds, through a range of channels, has encouraged a much more positive construction of national identity. The majority of the Malay participants, and to a lesser extent the Indian, Chinese, Punjabi participants, feel that television can play a significant role in unifying the different sectors of the population. However, detailed analysis reveals that most television channels, particularly the commercial channels and RTM 2, are highly dependent on imported programmes to provide content for the different ethnic groups. This over-reliance on imported content is driven by the effort to gain popularity and to bolster revenues (it is much cheaper to show imported programmes than to produce local ones). Nonetheless, as Karthigesu (1988, 1994a, 1994b) has demonstrated, such imported programmes are more likely to unify multi-ethnic audiences in Malaysia than the local programmes, which have a tendency to divide the population.

Participants from the ethnic minorities of Sabah and Sarawak, as well as some of the Indian and Chinese participants (and a minority of the Punjabi and Malay participants), commented on the uneven distribution of television programmes in Malaysia. This mainly concerned local programmes. They felt there was a greater concentration on the majority groups (i.e. the Malay and, to some extent, the Chinese and Indian groups), and that this resulted in an unfair emphasis on majority group interests. This has meant that other ethnic minority groups were marginalized as a result, a problem that effectively undermines the construction of a unified national identity. These views thus confirm arguments made by Mustaffa and Wang (1996), and Karthigesu (1994b), namely that television in Malaysia typically promotes a selective representation of the nation, mainly centring on the Malays, while failing to provide adequate space for other ethnic groups.

It is significant to note that participants had a tendency to regard television as an important medium for promoting a sense of national identity. However, for some participants the role of television in constructing their sense of national identity was 'seasonal', that is, it was only applicable during specific periods of time. For them, this notion was expressed through television programmes that enhanced their sense of national pride. This aspect was also identified by Poole (1999) where he claimed that the sense of belonging of all citizens results from them sharing common experiences. These common experiences were often centred around 'seasonal programmes' (especially sporting events) or 'national achievements' that created a strong motivation for the members of the nation state to take pride in their feelings of citizenship as well as a sense of belonging. These aspects were particularly evident among the Malay, Indian, Punjabi and Chinese participants.

On the other hand, some participants from the Punjabi and Sabah groups demonstrated a strong attachment to the images of 'place and locality' provided by local programmes for their sense of national identity. Television images in this sense appear capable of helping to fix their 'position' in the world.

For other participants, a sense of 'security' was seen as an important element for the construction of national identity. Imported television programmes that portrayed natural disasters, unstable politics and race discrimination, according to some participants within the Chinese, Indian and Sabah groups further enhanced their 'sense of belonging' to Malaysia.

Given the fact that the Malaysian population is made up of various ethnic groups, it is not surprising that official attempts to promote a collective sense of national harmony and unity have sought to portray multi-ethnicity in positive terms. Significantly, however, the findings from the focus group discussions suggest that such efforts produced mixed feelings amongst the young adult participants. On the one hand, some participants, especially the Malay, Indian and Punjabi groups, expressed a general agreement that the projection of a harmonious relationship between the multi-ethnic characters played a crucial part in uniting and further formulating a sense of national identity among Malaysians. On the other hand, some of the participants, particularly those with Chinese, Punjabi, Sarawak and Indian ethnic backgrounds, did not give the same interpretation to the significance of the multi-ethnic characters on television. For them, the appearance of characters with different ethnic backgrounds on television often had negative implications. Some of the participants argued that this kind of portrayal usually resulted in creating a 'hierarchical' sense of the place of different ethnic groups in Malaysian society, as noted by Wang and Mustafa (1996) and Noor Bathi (1996).

Whilst the findings discussed above indicate that the participants' negotiation of television entertainment, advertisement and sporting programmes led them to believe that these programmes were important sources for articulating a sense of national identity, it is evident that news and current affairs programmes do not work in the same way. When discussing these latter types of programmes, the participants tended to reject the idea that local factual programmes play a key role in constructing national identity. Still, only a

minority of the participants presented fully developed views on this topic across the range of different ethnic backgrounds. As noted earlier, discussions about news and current affairs programmes involved only a small number of participants due to the fact that most participants did not want to express critical opinions with regard to governmental politics. For those who expressed negative responses towards local television news and current affairs programmes, it was usually because the content of these programmes was seen to be strongly biased towards the government's agenda and because little space was provided for alternative views. Some participants questioned the 'credibility' of the content of the factual programmes in Malaysia, regarding foreign factual programmes to be more 'trustworthy' as a general rule. This in turn has resulted in the participants expressing a diverse range of views on what amounts to 'freedom of expression', and how it should function in Malaysia. It followed, therefore, that this situation has not encouraged the growth of a more liberal democratic political climate of freedom of expression to be experienced by the citizens of Malaysia. Dissatisfaction arising from this situation has resulted in more sceptical perceptions about the extent to which television can promote a sense of national identity. However, when the foreign media coverage were seen as a 'threat' to the nation, some participants in this sense chose to display a sense of loyalty to Malaysia which in turn encouraged participants to redefine their sense of collective identity.

Regarding the use of stereotypes on Malaysian television, the study found that participants often raised concerns regarding the 'conventional' labels given to members of various ethnic groups. The findings further indicate that the views about how Malay characters were portrayed on television were often advanced from two different perspectives. On the one hand, the Malay participants claimed that images of them on television, in general, were highly stereotyped, usually in negative ways, and were often associated with 'moral, traditional and religious values'. Other participants from different ethnic backgrounds provided conflicting views, however, often asserting that the image of the Malays on

television was usually projected 'forward moving' characters. With regard to the Chinese characters on television, by and large the participants suggested that television gives a positive representation of them. Media images that were particularly positive were those associated with successful achievements within the economic sector. On the other hand, for the Chinese participants, although they perceived that the presentation of characters from their ethnic group was mainly based on positive images, some of them felt that television displayed selective images of their community, which presented an 'unrealistic' picture. Regarding Indians' representation on television, the majority of the participants pointed to the negative images assigned to Indians on television as tending to reinforce their position at the lowest point of the social hierarchy of Malaysian society. The Punjabi participants felt that television portrayed them only as 'token' characters. Indeed, participants from across the different ethnic backgrounds thought that Punjabis only appear on television in a very minimal sense. As for the other ethnic minorities from Sabah and Sarawak, the findings suggest that their appearance on television was viewed as consisting of only a seasonal or intermittent coverage, linked to a political agenda. Above all, the stereotyping of television characters on Malaysian television was perceived by the participants as serving to widen ethnic divisions in Malaysian population, a conclusion echoed in the work by Wang and Mustaffa (1996) and Noor Bathi (1996).

Whilst television in many ways produces a variety of images that could play a significant role in constructing a collective national identity, there were also those views expressed by some participants who believed that television is an important medium exclusively for entertainment purposes. These participants were quick to dismiss any claim about the role of television in constructing a sense of national identity.

In conclusion, the perceptions of young adults from different ethnic backgrounds about television's role in articulating a sense of Malaysians national identity were complex. Amongst some of the participants, it was evident that there was a strongly positive sense

regarding the part television plays in the construction of national identity, namely revolving around the 'fair distribution of programmes', a 'seasonal sense of pride' and a 'sense of locality'. However, this feeling was countered by the contrasting views that television projected only selected images of the nation, and that programmes reaffirmed the stereotyping of ethnic characters in Malaysia. Further, some argued that television lacks a liberal and democratic approach, while others insisted that television fails to play an important role in the promotion of a collective sense of national identity. These views led some of the participants to feel marginalised and distant from the idea of the positive role of television in constructing a sense of collective unity. They felt that television did not facilitate the construction of a positive sense of national identity. Thus whilst the NCP and subsequent government policies have sought to utilise television in the promotion of national identity, this research suggests that such efforts may have only partly succeeded in producing images that have a positive resonance with young adults in Malaysia.

In conclusion, there is a need to re-evaluate, firstly, what amounts to a sense of national identity and, secondly, to further investigate the ways in which television programmes can effectively promote a collective sense of national identity. As a starting point, this study's observations about young Malaysian adults suggest that programmes must have a high entertainment value, and must encourage viewers to reach out to members of different ethnic groups as well as providing space for alternative views.

As a recommendation for future research within this area, I would suggest that a qualitative approach to audience interpretations of television images be used more extensively to further reveal the complexity of audience readings of television texts in Malaysia. Most studies of television audiences in Malaysia have been dominated by quantitative approaches used in particular ways. Quantitative findings are useful, in my view, but insufficient. The way quantitative methods have been typically used has not provided a

sufficiently in-depth picture, that is, they have not provided an understanding of audience readings and interpretations of television texts which recognises their contradictory nature.

This study does not claim to provide a complete picture or understanding of how young adults in Malaysia perceive and interpret television images. However, bearing in mind the lack of research of this kind in Malaysia, I hope that it will contribute to future studies in this important area of scholarly inquiry. Building on its insights, future investigations might consider a wider range of data. This might include the participation of different age groups, for example, or select participants with a wider range of social backgrounds, in order to analyse their understandings of television images in the context of national identity. In this era of globalisation, it would be similarly interesting to investigate how television relates to the ways Malaysian citizens see and value their sense of citizenship and national identity as being distinctive amongst the other nations in the world.

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APPENDIX 1

Pilot Work

Before explaining (pilot) research design and process, it would be appropriate to state here that this study should not be misinterpreted as an attempt to find any causal relationships between the aforementioned criteria (correlation between variables). This is because it would oversimplify the issues which are, in fact, very complicated and beyond the aims of this study. Therefore, the reason for including the different criteria of demography and social background was to decide the factors for group composition, rather than to make a correlation or comparison of all these criteria.

Research tools and techniques to collect the data involved the use of sets of focus group questions, background information questions, tape recordings and video recordings of a selection of programmes on Malaysian television. The venue for the discussions was a tutorial room in USM and in a domestic setting (at the home setting) for students at the UM, as explained in greater detail later. In deciding on whom to invite to participate in the pilot work, the elements mentioned above were considered, to determine the following:

1. Whether or not the different ethnic background of the participants provided different views on the topic under investigation.

2. Whether or not the age factor contributed to different views on the topic.

3. Whether or not different genders responded in different ways to the topic.

4. Whether or not a different state of origin influenced their response to the topic

5. Whether or not a different place of study has implications for their opinion about the topic.

6. Whether or not participants with exposure to different channels provided different views on the topic.

It should be noted here, that the political ideology of the university student was not tested during the pilot study. Generally, Malaysians are extremely sensitive about revealing their political viewpoint, and students would be likely to give a misleading answer if they were asked to indicate their political standing.

Samsudin and Latifah (1999:12) suggest that the factors that influenced the political activity or rather the sensitivity of the young adults in Malaysia were the result of obligation by the government. Their study shows that a high percentage, more than 80% of young adults, never participate in political activities, because government policies do not encourage students in high schools and universities to be involved and somewhat hinder their interest in political activities.

Recruitment of the participants for the pilot study was undertaken at the University Sains Malaysia (USM), in Penang in the North of Peninsular Malaysia and at the University of Malaya (UM), in Kuala Lumpur, the central capital city of Malaysia. Overall, there were seven groups involving 33 participants who attended the focus group sessions. Of the 7 sessions, 5 focus group sessions were conducted in USM and 2 were conducted in the UM.

Trying to motivate students to participate in the focus group sessions was difficult. At the time the field work was conducted, not only were participants busy with their fixed time table, attending lectures and tutorials, but also busy preparing themselves for their final exams. This added to the problem of finding suitable slots for each participant. Added to that, festival celebrations for the Chinese and Muslim communities also resulted in many students being reluctant to participate, and in them claiming that the appointed date was unsuitable since they had already booked a ticket for a festive holiday.

Recruitment of participants was done with the distribution of a form, requesting background information from the students, asking their name, age, gender, address, contact number, course of study, state of origin, and access and exposure to the different television channels. Then participants were asked to indicate whether they were interested in

participating in the discussion groups. The form was distributed in the university hostels and canteens.

However, recruiting participants in this way was a difficult task. Many of them did not return the form and some who did, indicated that they were unable to participate. Those who indicated that they were interested in participating were approached to fix a suitable time slot, and details about place and time were given to them. Since trying to recruit participants myself using this method was less than fruitful, I decided to ask a research assistant (university student) to help me with the recruitment. I then chose to get two research assistants one each from USM and UM.

Recruitment was done by myself and the two research assistants. We personally approached an individual, or a group of students, introduced ourselves, and explained the project. Questions were then asked following a set formula, (questions on background), and they were asked whether they were interested in taking part in the research. If they indicated that they were interested in participating, details about time and place were given to them. Attempt after attempt was made to recruit participants and this 'face to face' approach was very time consuming. Also, trying to find a suitable time slot for each student proved to be very difficult, especially finding a suitable time slot for all of the participants, resolving clashes with their lectures, tutorials and other university commitments. Thirty -three participants were recruited, which produced seven groups altogether. Having achieved this, a pilot project was conducted. The final composition of the groups for the pilot study was as follows:

USM Groups

Group 1

A Minority Group, which consisted of three students, all from the ethnic minority of Sabah. All were 21 years old, two females and one male. Two were from Education

Studies and one from Mass Communication Studies. All three watched only terrestrial channels.

Group 2

A Mixed Group, consisting of seven participants from Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic backgrounds. In terms of gender and course attended, they were divided between three males, from Applied Sciences and four females, from Mass Communication Studies. Participants in this group had access to satellite television. Their states of origin included Negeri Sembilan, Kuala Lumpur, Melaka, Perak, and Penang. All were 23 years old.

Group 3

This group consisted of five Malay participants, one female and four males on the Management course, with no access to satellite television. Their states of origin included Kedah, Melaka, Johor and Kelantan. All were 23 years old.

Group 4

A Chinese group with four participants one from Linguistics, one Biotechnology and two Mass Communication Studies. They had no access to satellite television and all were originally from the state of Penang. They were 20 years old.

Group 5

A Malay group with four participants. Three students were from Fine Art and one from Computer Sciences. All were male and had access to satellite channels. They were from Negeri Sembilan and Johor. Aged between 23-24 years old.

UM Groups

Group 6

An Indian group with five participants, 2 male and 3 female, from Accounting and English studies. Their states of origin were Negeri Sembilan, and Kuala Lumpur. All watched terrestrial television only. They were aged 20 and 21

Group 7

A Malay group of five, all female, studying Applied Sciences and Geography. Their states of origin were Penang and Kuala Lumpur. They all had access to satellite channels and were aged 21 and 23 years old.

Focus groups sessions for pilot work.

During the focus group sessions, a structured set of questions was prepared. The questions were designed to range from the general to the specific, with regards to the role television and to the national identity of the participants. The questions can be divided into the following categories as discussed by Kruger (1994:54-62):

a) Opening Questions:

This type of question attempts to establish a rapport between the moderator and the participants. In my view, it is important to establish this kind of relationship so that the participants feel comfortable with the session's environment. In the pilot study, participants were asked to identify themselves i.e. to state their name, course of study, and state of origin.

b) Introductory Questions:

This type of question is designed to introduce participants to the topic under investigation. As an introductory question, participants were asked to identify their sense of 'belonging to the nation'.

c) Transitional Questions:

As the name suggests, these questions help to manoeuvre the conversation toward key questions central to the whole discussion. This type of question was also designed to help participants make a connection between the introductory and the key questions. At this stage, participants were asked to talk about television in Malaysia.

d) Key Questions:

At this stage, participants were required to relate images on television to the notion of national identity and sense of belonging.

e) Ending Questions:

These questions end the session. Participants were invited to provide a brief summary on their understanding as to the notion of national identity on television, by identifying the sort of programmes they would produce if they were asked. Finally, the session ended by thanking all the participants.

All sessions with the students at the 'University Sains Malaysia' were conducted at the tutorial rooms at the university. Meanwhile, sessions with participants from the 'University Malaya' were conducted at the home of one of the researcher's friends. This was because of the difficulty in arranging tutorial rooms to fit in with students' timetables. It had to be rearranged after their classes, in the evening, and access to the tutorial rooms was

unfortunately unavailable. The focus group sessions were conducted in Malay and English, as well as a mixture of both. All the data was translated and transcribed.

Results of the pilot study for focus group sessions

A summary of the results from the pilot groups sessions will be presented under four headings, Question design, Group composition, Number in group, Research Tools, and Other comments.

a) Question Design:

Overall, comments from the participants in response to the sequence of questions was fine. Regarding the clarity of the questions, some participants voiced their concern about the terminology used, such as the phrase 'national identity' in question 2; 'When you hear the word national identity what comes to your mind?' Some participants from the Chinese Group (4) and the Malay Group (7) suggested that I should describe to them what 'national identity' was, so that it would give participants a better idea of what to talk about in the discussion group. Some questions, particularly the key questions that were addressed during the pilot sessions also involved lots of probing and rephrasing because of the difficulty for the participants in understanding the questions. For example, on the question; 'What do you think about programmes in Malaysia?, participants had different ways of interpreting the question, some asked whether they should comment on the television channels, or on the different types of programmes.

b) Group Composition:

In order to discover the most significant elements for group composition, several comparisons were made. To find out whether different ethnicity had implications for the response about a certain question, responses from groups from different ethnic backgrounds, Group 1 (Minority from Sabah), Group 2 (Mixed ethnicity) Group 3, (All Malay) and Group 4, (All Chinese) were compared.

It was evident that participants in the different ethnic groups revealed varying responses. For example, in Group 1, when participants were invited to talk about television in Malaysia, the participants in this group raised concerns about their ethnic group being marginalised on television. Some responses from the Chinese groups indicated that television was only concerned with Malays. When this question was put to the Malay group, some of the respondents said that television made a specific effort to portray only Malays. In the mixed group, however, participants were quite tolerant, and the discussions were taken in a more open-minded way. Given the fact that different ethnic backgrounds provided different and interesting responses, the researcher considered that this factor should be one of the important elements in determining group composition.

With regard to age, gender and course, no implications were evident and most of the participants could actually talk about the topic under investigation. Some of them expressed similar views, eg, on perceptions of television stations, and the quality of local and imported programmes. Differing access to satellite television also had little influence on the responses, as many of the participants tended to talk more about television programmes available on terrestrial rather than on satellite television.

A different state of origin had few implications. This was due to the fact that television in Malaysia is 'national in character' and available nation-wide with the exception of Metrovision, which is only available in the Kelang Valley and in the capital city. As for different places of study, this had no implication for the study either, due to the fact that the universities in Malaysia are homogenous in student composition ie. multi-ethnic. So places of study did not actually influence participants views about the topic under investigation.

c) Research Tool:

The moderator played an important role in conducting the focus group sessions. Experience from the pilot project showed that participants from different ethnic

backgrounds other than my own, (Malay), showed some reticence when expressing critical views related to the Malays. I had to explain to the participants that the reason I was conducting the sessions was to obtain whatever responses and views they had on the topic under investigation. I was there simply to listen, and any response that I received would be respected and treated as confidential. This was done to make the participants from different ethnic backgrounds feel comfortable with the moderator. Earlier, before the beginning of the session, rapport between the participants and the moderator had been established, with 'small talk activity', eg asking whether they had already had their lunch (similar to talk about the weather in Britain). Some participants also raised their concern about the use of the tape recorder to collect data from the focus group sessions. I had to convince them by saying that all the information given during the session would be treated as confidential, and that the tapes would be kept in a safe place. Names would be changed and the participants identity would be anonymous.

In the groups where clips were used to stimulate the discussions, in Groups (4) and (6), some of the participants commented that visual aids were fine because it helped them refresh their memories. There was also a suggestion that I should add more footage, eg to include some programmes from different parts of the world, India or Hong Kong, and some from satellite television. On the other hand, the groups that were conducted without the use of visual aids suggested that I should provide them with some sort of short programmes to stimulate the discussions.

d) Other Comments:

Some of the participants noted that the discussion sessions were interesting because they had never experienced a focus group session. For them, it was a good opportunity for self-expression. Some comments from groups of the same ethnic background also suggested that I should consider mixing the groups to get more of a variety of answers.

In one of the Chinese groups, (4), one of the participants noted that she was unable to provide any response to a specific question on television programmes in Malaysia due to the fact she had not been watching television for a long time, as she preferred to watch DVD instead. Thus, it was important to take into account whether or not a student was interested in watching television as an activity.

The results from the pilot project only provided the researcher with an initial idea of what to expect from the focus group sessions. Therefore, in order for the researcher to get further detailed results from proper focus group sessions, the actual study was arranged. (See chapter 5).

APPENDIX 2

Exploratory Survey

1. Race:.....

2. Gender :.....

3. 'Mother tongue language' :.....

4. Correspondent address :.....

5. Course :.....

6. Year of study :.....

7. Which of the following television channels do you like to watch? Please numbered 1,2,3...etc according to your preference.

a) RTM 1 [ ]
b) RTM 2 [ ]
c) TV 3 [ ]
d) Metrovision [ ]
e) Mega TV [ ]
f) Astro [ ]
g) NTV 7 [ ]

8. Which of the following categorise of the local programmes you like to watch most? Please numbered 1,2,3...etc according to your preference.

a) News [ ]
b) TV magazine [ ]
c) Documentary [ ]
d) Musical [ ]
e) Drama/film [ ]
f) Sitcom [ ]
g) Sport [ ]
h) Cooking [ ]
i) Cartoon [ ]
j) Quiz [ ]
k) Talk show [ ]
l) Others (please specify)
.....[ ]

9. In which language do you like to watch your favourite local programme?

a) Malay [ ]
b) English [ ]
c) Chinese (Madrin/Hokkien) [ ]
d) Tamil [ ]
e) Hindi [ ]
e) Others (Please specify)
.....[ ]

10. Which of the following categorise of the imported programmes you like to watch most? Please numbered 1,2,3...etc according to your preference.

a) News [ ] b) TV magazine [ ]
c) Documentary [ ] d) Musical [ ]
e) Drama/film [ ] f) Sitcom [ ]
g) Sport [ ] h) Cooking [ ]
i) Cartoon [ ] j) Quiz [ ]
k) Talk show [ ] l) Others (please specify)
.....[ ]

11. In which language do you like to watch your favourite imported programmes?

a) Malay [ ] b) English [ ]
c) Chinese (Madrin/Hokkien) [ ] d) Tamil [ ]
e) Hindi [ ] e) Others (Please specify)
.....[ ]

12. How many hours on average do you spend watching television on daily basis?

a) 0-2 hours a day [ ] b) >2-4 hours a day [ ]
c) >4-6 hours a day [ ] d) >6-8 hours a day [ ]
e) > 8 hours a day [ ]

13. When do you like to watch television on a daily basis?
a) Morning before 9
b) Morning 9-12 noon [ ] c)Afternoon 12-3pm [ ]
d) Evening 3-7 pm [ ] e) Night 7 pm above [ ]

14. How many hours on average do you spend watching television on the weekend?

a) 0-2 hours a day [ ] b) >2-4 hours a day [ ]
c) 4-6 hours a day [ ] d) >6-8 hours a day [ ]
e) > 8 hours a day [ ]

15. When do you like to watch television on the weekend?
a)Morning before 9
b) Morning 9-12 noon [ ] c)Afternoon 12-3pm [ ]
d) Evening 3-7 pm [ ] e) Night 7 pm above [ ]

Thank You

Background Survey/Nomination List

1. Name :.....

2. Race:.....

3. Gender :.....

4. 'Mother tongue language' :.....

5. Correspondent address :.....

6. Course :.....

7. Year of study :.....

8. Please numbered (1, 2, 3...) television's channels you normally watch according to your priority.

a) RTM 1 [ ]
b) RTM 2 [ ]
c) TV 3 [ ]
d) Metrovision [ ]
e) Mega TV [ ]
f) Astro [ ]
g) NTV 7 [ ]

9. Please numbered (1,2,3...) the categorisation of the **local** programmes you normally watch according to your priority.

a) News [ ]
b) TV magazine [ ]
c) Documentary [ ]
d) Musical [ ]
e) Drama/film [ ]
f) Sitcom [ ]
g) Sport [ ]
h) Cooking [ ]
i) Cartoon [ ]
j) Quiz [ ]
k) Talk show [ ]
l) Others (please specify)
.....[ ]

10. Please numbered (1,2,3...) the categorisation of the **imported** programmes you normally watch according to your priority.

a) News [ ]
b) TV magazine [ ]
c) Documentary [ ]
d) Musical [ ]
e) Drama/film [ ]
f) Sitcom [ ]
g) Sport [ ]
h) Cooking [ ]
i) Cartoon [ ]
j) Quiz [ ]
k) Talk show [ ]
l) Others (please specify)
.....[ ]

11. How many hours on average do you spend watching television everyday?
    Please specify.....hours

12. How many hours on average do you spend watching television on weekend?
    Please specify.....hours

13. When was the last time do you watch television (e.g. Last night, yesterday, last week, etc...)
    Please specify.....

-Thank You-

Invitation Letter to a Focus Group Interview

To :.....

Thank you for you agreement to attend to the Focus Group Interview session on ***"Television in Malaysia : Implications for Young Adults' Perceptions of National Identity".***

The session will involve informal discussions on the topic mentioned above. The number of participants will be between 4-6 people per session. All views presented at the session will be treated as confidential. This is strictly for an academic project and the identity of the participants will be anonymous. Since the sessions involve a small number of participants, the success of the sessions depends on your co-operation.

Below are the details of your participation in the Focus group sessions:

Date:.....

Time:.....

Venue:.....

In the event that you were unable to attend the session, please call me as soon as possible at 04- 657622.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

.....
(Juliana Abdul Wahab)

Focus Group Composition

Malay A

The group was made up of 4 participants, 3 female and 1 male. All of them only had access to terrestrial television. The first participant was Ahmad Nabil, aged 21, from Penang, in his 2nd year studying Humanities. The second participant was Umi Salmah, aged 22, from Negeri Sembilan, in her 3rd year studying Education. The third participant was Azmah, aged 23, from Perak, in her final year studying Humanities. The fourth participant was Norhazni, aged 21, from Terangggganu, in her 2nd year studying Mass Communication.

Malay B

The group was made up of four participants, all male. The first participant was Razak, aged 20, from Kelantan, in his 1st year studying Mass Communication. The second participant was Zain, aged 20, from Negeri Sembilan, in his 1st year studying Management. Both of them had access to terrestrial and Astro, satellite television. The third participant was Nash, aged 23, from Kedah, in his final year studying Mass Communication, who had access to terrestrial television. The fourth, participant was Azmi, aged 20, from Johor, in his 1st year studying Mass Communication was also only have access to terrestrial television.

Chinese A

The group was made up of six participants, equally divided between male and female. The first was Brenda, aged 22, from Pahang, in her 3rd year studying Mass Communication, who had access to terrestrial and satellite television. The second participant was Fu Ying, aged 23, from Kelantan, in her final year studying Mass Communication, who only had access to terrestrial television. The third participant Mui Ghee aged 22 from Perak, in her 3rd year studying Management, who had access to terrestrial television only. The fourth

participant was Kawai, aged 22, from Kulala Lumpur in his 3rd year, studying Social Sciences, who has access to terrestrial television. The fifth participant was Wai Tam, aged 22, from Johor, in his 3rd year studying Technology Industry, he had access to terrestrial channels only. The sixth participant was Allan, aged 23, from Melaka, in his final year studying, Mass Communication, who only had access to terrestrial channels.

Chinese B

The group was made up of five participants, four male and one female. The first participant was Fung Nee, aged 20, from Penang, in her 1st year studying Education, had access to terrestrial and satellite channel. The second participant was Chia Cheng, aged 22, from Johor in his 3rd year studying Control Technology. The third participant was Lim Seng, aged 21, from Johor, in his 2nd year studying Chemistry. The fourth participant was Richard, aged 20, from Johor, in his 1st year studying Management. The fifth participant was Beng Gee, aged 22, in his 2nd year studying Applied Chemistry. All the males only had access to terrestrial channels.

Indian A

This group was made up of five participants, two female and three male. The first participant was Sita, aged 20, from, Penang in her 1st year studying Education. The second participant was Rani, aged 20, from Kula Lumpur in her 1st year studying English. The third participant was Kunam, aged 22, from Perak, in his 3rd year studying Education, The fourth participant was Subadrom, aged 20, from Kuala Lumpur in his 1st year studying Management. All of these four participants only had access to terrestrial channels. The fifth participant was Remy, aged 20, from Penang, in his 1st year studying Management, who had access to terrestrial and satellite television.

Indian B

This group was made up of four participants, two female and two male. The first participant was Prekha, aged 20, from Pahang, in her 1st year studying Social Sciences. The second participant was Jayanti, aged 21, from Penang in her 2nd year studying Mass Communication. The third participant was Subra, aged 23, from Selangor, in his final year studying Social Sciences. The fourth participant was Jack, aged 20, from Perak, in his 1st year, studying Social Sciences. All participants in this group only had access to terrestrial television.

Punjabi A

This group was made up of four participants, two female and two male. The first participant was Kavita aged 21, from Penang in her 2nd year, studying Management. The second participant was Surinder, aged 21, from Penang, studying Management. The third participant was Pretam, aged 21, from Kuala Lumpur in his 2nd year, studying Applied Sciences. The fourth participant was Hardip, aged 24, from Negeri Sembilan, in his final year, studying Mass Communication. All of them had access to terrestrial television only.

Punjabi B

The group was made up of four participants, two female and two male. The first participant was Jastina, aged 20, from Perak, in her 1st year studying Management. The second participant was Roona, female aged 20, from Penang, studying Language and Interpretation. The third participant was Navshier, aged 20, from Kuala Lumpur, in his 1st year, studying Humanities. All of them only has access to terrestrial channels. The fourth participant was Sosch, aged 21, from Johor, in his 2nd year studying Computer Science, who had access to terrestrial and satellite television.

Minority from Sabah

This group was made up of five participants, two females and three males. All the participants in the groups were from the Kadazan, one of the ethnic groups in Sabah. The first participant was Vennie, aged 21, in her 2nd year studying Education. The second participant was Jolina, aged 20, in her 1st year studying Management. The third participant was Steve, aged 20, in his 1st year studying Physical Science. The fourth participant was Phil, aged 21, in his 2nd year studying Education. All the first four participants only had access to terrestrial channels. The fifth participant was Harry, aged 21, in his 2nd year studying Quality Control, with access to terrestrial and satellite channels.

Minority from Sabah and Sarawak

The group was made up of five participants, two and three male. The first participant was Rita, aged 21, from Sabah, and the ethnic minority of Bukit, in her 2nd year, studying Physics. The second participant was Shafiza, aged 23, from Sarawak, and the ethnic minority of Melanau, in her final year studying Physics. The third participant was Tammy, aged 22, from Sarawak, and the ethnic minority of Bidayuh, in his 3rd year studying Management. The fourth participant was Ruslan, aged 21, from Sarawak, and the ethnic minority of Melanau, in his 2nd year studying Industrial Technology. All of the four participants only had access to terrestrial television. The fifth participant was Redza, aged 23, from Sabah, and the ethnic minority of Suluk, in his final year studying Physical Science and he had access to satellite TV.

Mixed Group A

The group was made up of seven participants from different ethnic backgrounds, five female and two male. The first participant was Rozita, aged 20, a Malay, from Melaka, in her 1st year studying Social Sciences. The second participant was Rubaidah, aged 20, also Malay, from Penang in her 1st year studying Social Sciences. The third participant was

Helena, aged 22, Chinese, from Penang, in her 3nd year studying Education. The fourth participant was Christy, aged 21, Indian, from Perak, in her 2nd year studying Translation and Interpretation. The fifth participant was Bala, aged 20, Indian, from Penang, in his 1st year, studying Translation and Interpretation. The six was Lily, aged 24 in her final year studying Education, from Sabah. The seventh participant was Danny, aged 22, Punjabi, from Penang, in his 3rd year studying Translation and Interpretation. All of the participants in this group only had access to terrestrial channels.

Mixed Group B

The group was made up of six participants from different ethnic backgrounds, three female and three male. The first participant was Malina aged 23, Indian, from Perak, in her final year. The second participant was Anis, female aged 18, Malay, from Kelantan, a matriculation student. The third participant was Masri, aged 18, from Sabah and the ethnic minority of Suluk, a matriculation student. The fourth participant was Chee Kong, aged 20, Chinese, from Penang, studying Social Sciences. The fifth participant was Santokh, aged 20, from Perak, in his 1st year. The sixth participant was Muin, aged 18, from Sarawak, and the ethnic minority of Melanau, a matriculation student. All the participants only had access to terrestrial channels.

-Focus Group Questions-

Television in Malaysia: Implications for Young Adults' Perceptions of National Identity.

A-Opening questions: Participants feel connected.

1.Can you introduce your self: **(2-4 minutes).**

a) Your name

b) Course

c) Stage of study

d) Your home town

B-Introductory questions: Introduce to the topic under investigation

(3-4 minutes each).

2. I am interested to know what does it mean to be a Malaysian citizen to you?

(3-4 minutes each).

3. When you hear the word national identity, what comes a cross your mind?

Probe i.e Anything at all, that you can think of.

(3-4 minutes each).

4. If you were to explain to someone about Malaysian culture, how would you do it?

(3-4 minutes each).

Break to show clips (7 minutes) –

C-Transition questions: Move the conversation towards key question that derived the study.

5. What is your opinion of television channels in Malaysia in general?

(4 minutes each)

a) RTM 1

b) RTM 2

c) TV 3

d) MetroVision

e) Mega TV

f) Astro- satellite TV

g) NTV 7

h) What do you think of the local programes on Malaysian Television?

i) What you think of the imported programmes on Malaysian Television?

D-Key questions: To obtain insight for the topic under investigation-most important (5-7 minutes each).

6. What sort of images on television in Malaysia, you consider portraying identity of your own country? **(5-7 minutes)**

7. a) Do any of the **local** programmes on television **increase** your sense of being/belonging to Malaysia? **(5-7 minutes)**

Probe: What are the kind of programes that you think provide your self with sense of positive feeling?love and pride to you country, i.e gretafull to belong here?

b) Do any of the **local** programmes on television **decrease** your sense of being/belonging to Malaysia? **(5-7 minutes)**

Probe: What are the kind of foreign programmes you think did not contribute to promote/enhance your sense of love, pride/ towards your country?

8. a) Do any of the **imported** programmes on television **increase** your sense of being/belonging to Malaysia? **(5-7 minutes)**

Probe: What are the kind of foreign programes that you think provide your self with positive feeling/sense of love and pride to you country, i.e gretafull to belong here?

b) Do any of the **imported** programmes on television **decrease** your sense of being/belonging to Malaysia? **(5-7 minutes)**

Probe: What are the kind of foreign programmes you think did not contribute to promote/enhance your sense of love, pride/ towards your country?

E-Transition question: Move the conversation towards key question that derived the study (3-4 minutes).

9. Do you think television caters/provides programmes to all ethnic races/groups in Malaysia? **(3-4 minutes)**

F-Key question: To obtain insight for the topic under investigation-most important (5 minutes each).

10. How do you see yourself (as one of the ethnic race/group in Malaysia) has having been or being portrayed on television Malaysia? **(5 minutes)**

11. How do you see other ethnic races/groups (than yourself) has having been or being portrayed on television Malaysia? **(5-7 minutes)**

G-Ending question: Bring closure to the discussions. **(2-4) minutes)**

12.a) If you were given a chance to produce programmes on television that is portraying Malaysian identity, how would you do it? **(4-minutes)**

b)As a Malaysian citizen what do you think television should be doing to you? **(3-minutes)**

13.Did we missed anything? **(2 Minutes)**

14. Any Comments? **(2 Minutes)**

Note: Percentage were only given to numbers which are >100.

Results from Exploratory Survey

1. Results from the survey indicated that the majority 55% (66/120) respondents of young adults across the groups preferred to watch the latest television channel Ntv7 compared to other channels. More than half 52% (63/120) of the respondents indicated Ntv7 as their favourite. TV 3, was second in their preference with 29% (35/120) respondents. RTM 2 and Astro were chosen by a small number of 8.3% (10/120) respondents and finally only 1.6% (2/120) of respondents chosen RTM 1 as their most watched Channel. None of the respondents indicated Metrovission or Mega TV as their favourite Channel.

When broken down into different ethnic groups, the Chinese respondents were shown to have most viewers watching this Channel, with more than half (14/20), another (3/20) of them preferred to watch both RTM 2 and Astro respectively. Indians were the second most common ethnic group to watch Ntv7 with (12/20). whilst, Malay and Sabahan had (10/20) respondents each and the lowest number who watched Ntv7 were the Punjabi respondents with (8/20) of their group. See Table 1.

Table 1

Favourite Television Channels

Television Channels		Ethnic Groups						
		Malay	Chinese	Indian	Punjabi	Sabah	Sarawak	Total
1	RTM1	1	-	-	-	-	1	1/120
2	RTM2	-	3	1	3	2	1	10/120
3	TV3	7	-	6	6	9	7	35/120
4	Metro	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	Mega	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6	Astro	2	3	1	3	-	1	10/120
7	NTV7	10	14	12	8	9	10	63/120
Total		20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	120/120

2. In terms of preferred local programs, results from the survey showed that, in general, more participants watched local news with 33.3% (40/120) of participants. The second most watched local programmes was film/drama with 30.8% (37/120), followed by documentary and television magazine with 8.3% (10/120) each. The fourth most watched programmes were musical programmes and sitcom with 5.8% (6/120) respectively. The fifth most watched local programmes among the respondents were sports, with 5% (6/120). Talk shows were in the sixth place with 1.6% (2/120) and finally, cartoon in the seventh place with 0.8% (1/120). None of the respondent indicated that cooking or Quiz/Game show as their preference,

According to ethnicity, it was evident that most Chinese respondent (10/20) preferred to watch local news in comparison to other local programmes. The second most watched programmes by them was, local film/drama with (4/20), followed by sports programmes with (2/20). Talk shows, sitcoms and documentaries were their fourth choice with (1/20). Similarly, the survey results also revealed that, Punjabi respondents indicated that news as their most watched local television programmes with (9/20). The second most watched local programmes among them were television magazine with (4/20), followed by Drama and Film with (3/20). Television sitcom was at the fourth choice with (2/20) and musical programmes the fifth choice with (1/10).

In general, a majority of the Sarawakian respondents indicated that they liked to watch television news with (7/20), followed by film/drama and documentary in second place, with (5/20). Television magazines, musicals and sitcoms were their fourth choice with (1/20) for each programme. On the other hand, most Malay respondents, revealed that, they likes to watch local film/drama in comparison to other local programmes, with (12/20). In second place was television news with (5/20). Finally, documentaries, talk shows and musical programmes were the third choice for the Malay respondents, with only (1/20) for each programme. Similarly, Indian respondents also indicates that their most

watched local television programmes were film/drama with (7/20), television magazine in second place, with (5/20) followed by news as their third choice, with (3/20). Finally documentaries and sitcoms were in fourth place, (2/20). In the survey it was also evident that most respondents from Sabah preferred to watch film/drama and television news, with (6/20) each in comparison to other programmes. Their second preference were a musical programmes with (4/20), followed by sports programmes with (3/20) and finally television sitcom with 5% (1/20). See table 2.

Table 2

Favourite Local Programme According to Ethnic Group

Television Programmes		Ethnic Groups						
		Malay	Chinese	Indian	Punjabi	Sabah	Sarawak	Total
1	News	5/20	10/20	3/20	9/20	6/20	7/20	40/120
2	Docu	1/20	1/20	2/20	1/20	-	5/20	10/120
3	Drama /Film	12/20	4/20	7/20	3/20	6/20	5/20	37/120
4	Sports	-	2/20	1/20	-	3/20	-	6/120
5	Cartoon	-	1/20	-	-	-	-	1/120
6	Talk Show	1/20	1/20	-	-	-	-	2/120
7	TV Mag	-	-	5/20	4/20	-	1/20	10/120
8	Musical	1/20	-	-	1/20	4/20	1/20	7/20
9	Sitcom	-	1/20	2/20	2/20	1/20	1/20	7/20
10	Cooking	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
11	Quiz/ Game	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
12	Others	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total		20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	120/120

3. In terms of preferred language for local programmes, in general, participants preferred to watch local programmes in the Malay language with majority of 55% (66/120). English language on the other hand came second with 35% (42/120) indicating that they preferred

to watch programmes in the English language. The Tamil language was the third most watched language with 7.5% (9/120). Finally, local programmes in the Chinese language were preferred by the small number of the respondents surveyed with 2.5% (3/120). None of the respondents indicated that they like to watch local programmes in Hindi. This was due to the fact that local programmes in the Hindi language are very rare.

When broken down into different ethnic backgrounds, it was clear that most of the respondents representing ethnic minorities from Sarwak liked to watch programmes in the Malay language, with (17/20) and the other (3/20) preferred to watch local programmes in English. Similarly, Malay respondents also liked to watch programmes in their own language, with (13/20), (7/20) indicated that they liked to watch local programmes in English language. For Chinese respondents, they mostly preferred to watch local programmes mainly in the English language, with (10/20). (7/20) indicated that they preferred to watch local programmes in the Malay language. Only a small number (3/20) of the Chinese preferred to watch programmes in the Chinese language. Results form the survey revealed that the Indian respondents's preferences were also diverse. However, in general most Indians preferred to watch local programmes in the Tamil language, with (9/20). (6/20) indicated that they liked to watch local programmes in English and finally the Malay language was preferred by (5/20) of the Indian respondents. (11/20) of the Punjabi respondents indicated that they liked to watch local programmes in English while the remaining (9/20) were interested in watching local programmes in Malay. As for the respondents from Sabah, the majority of them liked to watched local programmes in Malay with (15/20) and another (5/20) indicated that they liked to watch local programmes in English. Finally, the survey results revealed that more than three quarters (17/20) of the respondents of ethnic minorities from Sarawak like to watch Malay programmes and the remaining (3/20) chose to watch local programmes in the English language. See Table 3.

Table 3

Language Preferences for Local Programmes according to Ethnic Group

Language Preferences		Ethnic Groups						
		Malay	Chinese	Indian	Punjabi	Sabah	Sarawak	Total
1	Malay	13/20	7/20	5/20	9/20	15/20	17/20	66/120
2	English	7/20	10/20	6/20	11/20	5/20	3/20	42/120
3	Chinese	-	3/20	-	-	-	-	3/120
4	Hindi	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	Tamil	-	-	9/20	-	-	-	9/120
6	Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total		20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	120/120

4. As for imported programmes, the survey revealed that there was a wide variety of preferred television genres amongst the respondents. However, the most popular were imported films/drama with a majority 46.6% (56/120) of participants watching. Musical programmes came second in their preference with 15.8% (19/120) and television sitcom were at the third place, gaining 11.6% (14/120) of the respondents interest. Television news and documentaries were the fourth choice among the respondents with 10.8% (13/120). In fifth place, in terms of the preference, was a television talk show, with 2.5% (3/120) and, finally, the least preferred programmes were sports and cartoons which only attracted 0.8% (1/120) of the total respondents. None of the respondents surveyed indicate that they liked to watch cooking or Quiz/Game shows.

In terms of ethnic breakdown, it was evident, overall, that all the respondents from the different ethnic backgrounds preferred to watch imported film/drama on television in comparison to other programmes. This was most apparent among the Malay and Indian respondents with (11/20) each. Musical programmes was second in Malay respondent

preference, with (4/20). Sitcom and documentary were the third most watched imported programmes, with (2/120) respectively. Finally cartoons, (1/20) were watched least by Malay respondents. None of the Malay respondents indicated that they like to watch imported television news. As for the Indians the second most watched imported programmes, were documentaries, at (5/20) respondents. News was at the third preference, with (2/20) and, finally, both musicals and sitcoms were the last preference for most Indian respondents. Out of 20 Chinese respondents surveyed, half (10/20) indicated imported film/drama as their first choice. Television news on the other hand was chosen as their second preference with (4/20). (3/20) of the respondents indicated that they like to watched musical programmes, while sitcoms were preferred by (2/20) of the Chinese respondents. Finally, a small number of the Chinese participants, (1/20) chose cartoons as their most watched programmes.

Similarly, for the Punjabi respondents, the survey results revealed that (8/20) of respondents liked to watch film/drama. Sitcom was the second most watched imported programme for the Punjabis, with (4/20). Television magazine and talk show came in fourth place with (3/20) each, while only a small number of the Punjabi respondents indicated that they liked to watch imported news programmes on television. The survey also revealed that half (10/20) of Sabahan respondents stated that film/drama were their most watched imported programmes. In general, it was evident that the second most watch imported programmes for Sabahan respondents were news and musicals with (3/20) each. Sitcom were preferred by (2/20) of respondents whilst, documentaries and sports were chosen only by (1/20) of Sabahan respondents. Finally Sarawak, (6/20) respondents indicated that they liked to watch imported film/drama. The second most watched imported programmes for them were musicals with (5/20). Documentaries were chosen by (4/20) of respondents, and sitcoms were in fourth place with (3/20). Only a small number of Sarwakian respondents indicated that they liked to watch imported news, with only (2/20). See table 4.

Table 4

Favourite Imported Programmes According to Ethnic Group

Television Programmes		Ethnic Groups						
		Malay	Chinese	Indian	Punjabi	Sabah	Sarawak	Total
1	News	-	4/20	2/20	2/20	3/20	2/20	13/120
2	Docu	2/20	1/20	5/20	-	1/20	4/20	13/120
3	Drama /Film	11/20	10/20	11/20	8/20	10/20	6/20	56/120
4	Sports	-	-	-	-	1/20	-	1/120
5	Cartoon	1/20	-	-	-	-	-	1/120
6	Talk Show	-	-	-	3/20	-	-	3/120
7	TV Mag	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8	Musical	4/20	3/20	1/20	3/20	3/20	5/20	19/120
9	Sitcom	2/20	2/20	1/20	4/20	2/20	3/20	14/20
10	Cooking	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
11	Quiz/ Game	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
12	Others	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total		20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	120/120

5. As for the preferred language of the imported programmes, survey results revealed that most respondents 60% (72/120) indicated that they liked to watch imported programmes in the English language in comparison with other languages available on television. The second most preferred imported programmes were in the Hindi language, these were chosen by 20.8% (25/120) of the respondents whilst, imported programmes in the Chinese (Madrin/Hokkiean) language were watched by 14.6% (17/120) of the respondents. In addition, a small number of respondents revealed that they liked to watch imported programmes in the Tamil language, with 5% (6/120).

In terms of different ethnic backgrounds, the ethnic groups which watched imported programmes in English language most were the Punjabis and the Sarawak with (14/20). As for the Punjabi respondents the remaining (6/20) preferred to watch programmes in Hindi. The Sarawakian respondents has chose both the Chinese and the Hindi language as their second most watched programmes, with (3/20) each. Imported programmes in English language were watched by (13/20) of the Indians while (6/20) of the respondents liked to watch programmes in Tamil and a small number (1/20) preferred to watch programmes in Hindi. On the other hand the survey revealed that (12/20) of Sabahan respondents watched imported programmes in English. (7/20) indicated that they liked to watch programme in Hindi and 25% (5/20) liked to watch programmes in Chinese. Malay respondents on the other hand indicate that half, (10/20) liked to watch English programmes. (7/20) indicated that they liked to watch programmes in Chinese and the remaining (6/20) liked to watch programmes in the Hindi language. Finally, it was evident from the survey that Chinese respondents were the ethnic group least indicated to watch programmes in English with only (9/20). What is also apparent was that programmes in Chinese was chosen as the most watch by the Chinese respondents with (9/20). Only a small number of Chinese respondents indicated that they liked to watched programmed in Hindi with (2/20) See table 5.

Table 5

Language Preferences for Imported Programmes

Language Preferences		Ethnic Groups						
		Malay	Chinese	Indian	Punjabi	Sabah	Sarawak	Total
1	Malay	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	Chinese	6/20	9/20	-	-	3/20	3/20	21/120
3	Hindi	4/20	2/20	1/20	6/20	7/20	3/20	25/120
4	Tamil	-	-	6/20	-	-	-	6/120
5	Others	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6	English	10/20	9/20	13/20	14/20	10/20	14/20	70/120
Total		20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	120/120

Survey results indicated that on average, on a daily basis, respondents spent between 0-2 hours 46.6% (56/120) watching television. The second highest number of hours spend watching television was between 2-4 hours with 27.5% (33/120). Another 17.5% (21/120) of respondents, indicated that they spent between 4-6 hours watching television on a daily basis, while the remaining 8.3% (10/120) indicated that they watched 6-8 hours a day.

6. When analysed by ethnic background, it was clear that more than half (11/20) of the Malay respondents spend most time watching television between 0-2 hours in comparison to other ethnic groups. (5/20) of them spent between >2-4 hours and (4/20) indicated that they spent between >4-6 hours watching television on a daily basis. Similarly, Chinese respondents indicated that on average they watched television between 0-2 hours with (10/20) of respondents surveyed. Another chose to watch between >2-4 and the remaining (4/20) watched between >4-6 hours. The number of hours spent by Indian respondent in this survey were varied. It was evident that the majority of them spend between 0-2 hours with (9/20). On the other hand of them indicate that they spend between >2-4 and >4-6 hours on a daily basis respectively. Lastly, a small number of Indian respondents 5% (1/20) chose to watch between > 6-8 hours. As for the Punjabi respondents, the survey indicated that in general (7/20) of respondents preferred to spend between 0-2 and >6-8 hours daily each watching television each. About (5/20) liked to spend between >2-4 hours and the remaining (1/20) chose to spend between 4-6 hours watching television. The pattern of most respondents spend between 0-2 hours on a daily basis also extended to Sabahan respondents, with half of them, (10/20) watching for these number of hours. Another (6/20) indicated that they spent >2-4 hours and the remaining (4/20) spent between >4-6 hours. Respondents from Sarawak, they spent, (9/20) watching between 0-2 hours, (6/20) between >2-4 hours, about (3/20) spent between >4-6 hours and a small number, 10% (2/20) spent between >6-8 hours watching television. See table 6.

Table 6

Number of Hours Spent Watching TV on Weekdays

Number of Hours	Ethnic Groups						
	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Punjabi	Sabah	Sarawak	Total
0-2	11	10	9	7	10	9	56/120
>2-4	5	6	5	5	6	6	33/120
>4-6	4	4	5	1	4	3	21/120
>6-8	-	-	1	7	-	2	10/120
>8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	120/120

7. When participants were asked to indicate the time they normally watched television in a day during week days, in general, respondents revealed that they preferred to watch television in the evening from 7.00pm onwards, with 95% (114/120). Among all of the Chinese, Indian, and Punjabi respondents, none indicated that they liked to watch television during any other time. The breakdown for watching activity during these time were (19/20) of Sabahans, (18/20) of Malays and (17/20) of Sarawakians indicated that they liked to watch television after 7.00 PM. Only some respondents, (6/120) preferred to watch before 9.00 am in the morning. Mean while the Sarawakian respondents (3/20), Malay respondents with 10% (2/20) and (1/20) Sabahan respondents. See Table 7.

Table 7

Time Preferences for Watching TV on Weekdays

Time Preferences	Ethnic Groups						
	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Punjabi	Sabah	Sarawak	Total
Before 9.00	2/20	-	-	-	1/20	3/20	6/120
>9-12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
>12-3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
>3-7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
> 7	18/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	19/20	17/20	114/120
Total	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	120/120

8. Mean while for the weekend, on average, the results again revealed that, most respondents watched television for 0-2 hours, with 50% (60/120). 26.6% (32/120) indicated that they watched between 2-4 hours, while (17/120) revealed that they watched between 4-6 hours a day during the weekends. The remaining (11/120) chose to spend 6-8 hours a day during the weekends.

According to ethnicity, the survey results also showed that a majority, (14/20) of the Sarawakian respondents spent 0-2 hours watching television in a day during the weekend in comparison with other ethnic groups. About (3/20) of them spent between 2-4, whilst (2/20) watched between 4-6 and only (1/20) spent between 6-8 hours watching television in a day during the weekends. Similarly, Sabahan respondents also indicated that they spent about 2 hours daily during the weekend, with (12/20) respondents. Another (5/20) spent between 2-4 hours and a small number of (3/20) spent between 4-6 hours watching television during the weekends. Most Chinese respondents (10/20) spent between 0-2 hours watching television in a day during the weekends. About (5/20) of them spent between 2-4 and 4-6 hours each in a day during the weekends. As for the Indian their number of hours spent watching television were more varied. However, most of them watched television for about 2 hours, with (9/20) respondents. (5/20) spent between 6-8 hours, another (4/20) spent between 2-4 hours and the remaining (2/20) spent between 4-6 hours a day watching television during the weekend.

Similarly, the number of hours, spent watching television among the Punjabi respondents were also varied. Like most of the respondents surveyed, most of the Punjabis, (8/20) spent about 2 hours watching television in a day during the weekend and 30% (6/20) spent between >4-6 hours. (5/20) of the Punjabi respondents spent between >6-8 hours, whilst only (1/20) of them spent between >4-6 hours watching television in a day during the weekends. As for the Malay respondents it was evident that the majority of them spent between 0-2 hours watching television during the weekends with (9/20) respondents.

Another (7/20), of them allocated about >2-4 hours to watch television during the weekends and the remaining (4/20) spent between >4-6 hours in the weekends watching television. See Table 8.

Table 8

Number of Hours Spent Watching TV on Weekends

Number of Hours	Ethnic Groups						
	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Punjabi	Sabah	Sarawak	Total
0-2	7	10	9	8	12	14	60/120
>2-4	9	5	4	6	5	3	32/120
>4-6	4	5	2	1	3	2	17/120
>6-8	-	-	5	5	-	1	11/120
>8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	120/120

9. When they were asked to indicate the time they spent watching television during the weekend, the survey revealed that there were a wide variety of time preferences during the weekend in comparison to the time preference during weekdays. Overall respondents had chosen between 9-12 noon, with 45% (55/120) respondents. 35% (42/120) of them indicated that they liked to watch between 12-3 PM, while 18.3% (22/120) chose after 7.00 p.m. and only 0.8% (1/120) chose to watch before 9.00 am during the weekends.

When broken down into the different ethnic groups, it was evident that a majority of respondents representing ethnic minorities from Sabah preferred to watch television in the morning between 9-12pm, with (15/20) in comparison to other ethnic group. About (3/20) of them like to watch between 12-3pm and a small number of (2/20) watched television after 7pm. For Sarawakian respondents, most of them preferred to watch television between 9-12pm with (12/20). Another (6/20) liked to watch between 12-3pm and finally, (2/20) of them preferred watching television during the evening time after 7pm. As for the

Malay and Chinese respondents, the survey indicated that they preferred to watch television between 9-12 noon with (9/20). Within the Malay respondents it was evident that (5/20) preferred to watch between 12-3 pm and in the evening after 7 pm respectively and only (1/20) chosen before 9.00 am in the morning. As for the Chinese participants, (6/20) liked to watch between 12-3pm and the remaining (5/20) preferred watching television after 7.pm. The time preference in watching television amongst the Indian respondents was different to other ethnic groups. In general, a majority of the Indian respondents liked to watch television between 12-3pm with (15/20), the highest in comparison with other ethnic groups. (4/20) indicated that they liked to watch between 9-12 pm and only (1/20) preferred to watch after 7 pm. See Table 9.

Table 9

Time Preferences for Watching TV on Weekends

Time Preferences	Ethnic Groups						
	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Punjabi	Sabah	Sarawak	Total
Before 9.00	1/20	-	-	-	-	-	1/120
>9-12	9/20	9/20	4/20	7/20	15/20	12/20	56/120
>12-3	5/20	6/20	15/20	6/20	3/20	6/30	41/120
>3-7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
> 7	5/20	5/20	1/20	7/20	2/20	2/20	22/120
Total	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	20/20	120/120

Results of the Focus Group Sessions

One of the aims of this section is to provide background information about young adults' viewing habits, which includes, their favourite television channels, the source of the television programmes and the types of local as well as imported genres they like to watch. They were also asked to indicate the average of number of hours they spent watching television per day during the weekdays and at the weekend. There were also asked when they normally spent time watching television and when was the last time they watch television. It has to be noted this analysis of the results from the background information list only highlights some significant points within and across the groups, rather than outlining in detail results; by ethnic breakdown, as in the previous survey results. This was due to t the uneven distribution of the number of participants in each group.

In the survey, it was evident that, in general, respondents indicated that NTV7 carried their favourite programmes. However, the list of names giving background information about the participants revealed that across the groups, TV3 was preferred by the participants in comparison to other television channels with (24/59). This was apparent in the mixed group with (6/13) in the ethnic minority groups (participants in the Sabah and Sarawak groups) with (5/10), in the Malay group with (4/8) and in the Punjabi group with 37.5% (3/8). The second most watched television channel was Ntv7 which was preferred by (20/59) of those who turned up for the focus group sessions. These figures were largely drawn from participants in the Chinese and Indian groups, with (6/11) and (4/9) each. Another (7/59) participants across the groups indicated that they liked to watch Astro and RTM 2 respectively. The least watched channel was RTM 1 with only (1/59) of the Malay group. None of the participants in the session indicated Mega TV or Metrovission as their favourite channel.

In the survey results, it was evident that most respondents preferred to watch local news in comparison with other genres. The trend towards most people watching local news programmes was also evident in the background results of the focus group sessions. In general, participants preferred to watch local news in comparison to other television genres: (19/59). Mainly, local television news was watched by more than half the participants in the Indian and Punjabi groups with (5/9) and (5/8) each and the Chinese group with 16/59. However, none of the participants from the mixed group indicated that local news was their favourite genre; almost all of them 10/13 chose drama instead. Similarly, participants in the Malay and ethnic minority groups showed little interest in local news and chose musical programmes as their most watched local genre.

Language preference for local programmes varied between the different participants in the different groups. However, the Malay language was preferred by most of them with (22/59). This was most apparent in the Malay group and ethnic minority groups with (7/8) and (7/10) respectively and mixed groups, with (5/13). Participants in the Chinese, Indian and Punjabi groups were the least likely to watch local programmes in the Malay language. There was a tendency for them to watch local programmes in English or in their own language. Participants in the Indian group for example, had chosen the Tamil language as the most watched local programmes with (7/9) of participants. Participants in the Chinese group had chosen the English language with (6/10). Similarly, almost all of (7/8) the Punjabi participants preferred to watch programmes in English in comparison with other languages.

As for imported programmes, the survey revealed that there was a wide variety of preferred television genres among the respondents, however, the most popular were imported dramas and films. Results from the background information revealed a similar pattern. Out of the 59 participants who attended the focus groups sessions, (27/59) of the participants favoured imported film/ drama in comparison to other television genres. The

mixed groups had the most participants watching imported drama/film with more than half (10/13). Ethnic minorities on the other hand had (4/10) and Malays had (4/8). Participants in the Punjabi and Indian groups reported the lowest of all with (2/8) in the Punjabi group and (2/9) in the Indian group. In general, participants in the Punjabi group preferred to watch news with (3/8) whilst participants in the Indian groups chose documentaries.

As for the language of the imported programmes, the background list indicated a uniform preference. The majority (47/59) of the participants during the session chose the English language as the main source for the imported programmes they watched. Chinese programmes were preferred by some of the participants with (8/59). A small number of the participants indicated the Hindi language as the main source for entertainment programmes with (3/59) and only one participant from The Indian groups chose the Tamil language. None of the participants showed any interest in watching imported programmes in the Malay language i.e imported from Indonesia.

On average, (25/59) of participants spent between 2-4 hours watching television on a daily basis with the preferred viewing time being after 7 pm. This was related to their daily schedule as a student. During the weekend it was evident that most participants spent on average between 4-6 hours watching television with the preferred viewing time being between 9-12 noon with (27/59)

When participants were asked to indicate the 'last time' they watched television, in general, most participants watched television 24 hours ago with (14/59). Close to that figure, (13/59) of the participants indicated that they watched television last week. (5/59) stated that they watched television in the last month and finally (4/59) reported watching television in the last two weeks.